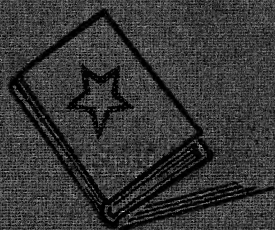


RUSSIAN YEAR



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RUSSIAN YEAR

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RUSSIAN YEAR

NO
*THE NOTEBOOK OF AN
AMATEUR DIPLOMAT*

by

XAVIER
PRUSZYNSKI



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RUSSIAN YEAR

Introduction

"WOULD you like to go with me to Moscow?" asked Professor Kot, formerly of Cracow University, a member of the Polish government in London and then the newly appointed Polish Ambassador to the U.S.S.R.

"I would love it," I replied, "but I am no diplomat."

The Professor smiled.

"Do you really think that professional diplomats are quite indispensable in a place where there are many things to be put right?"

"No, I don't."

"Neither do I," he said, "and besides I am no more a professional diplomat than you are. I will remain a historian and you a journalist. I will study Russia and so will you, in your own way. We may be able to do some work together."

That is how it all started.

1. *The City of Archangels*

MANY writers open their books about Russia with detailed accounts of their entry into that country. The readers of all the books about the U.S.S.R. published in the years 1920–1937 probably know by heart every corner of the frontier station of Niegoreloje, with its huge transparency appealing to the proletarians of all countries to unite, its bar with Russian vodka and the soldiers in dark, tall helmets with a red star. The small station on the Polish-Russian frontier was for twenty years the most popular doorway to the Unknown Country. Today it no longer exists. Both Polish and Russian frontier barriers were crushed by the German panzers. All those who remember Niegoreloje realise today how insignificant was that small town lost in the immense European plain stretching from the Rhine to the Urals. Niegoreloje was an accidental frontier station, like hundreds of others.

Archangel is today something quite different, a real doorway to Russia. You don't need communist slogans, Red soldiers or vodka to help you to realise that you have entered an entirely different, peculiar country.

A sea voyage is the right introduction for visiting a new country. An overland journey helps to blur the dividing line between countries and provides a more or less gradual transition from one country to the next. A sea-crossing

enhances the difference and brings out the full force of contrast. Liverpool in August, 1941, was England's farewell. An old, dark harbour. Docks, ships, shipyards. Smashed houses recalling two years of war. Then the sea. Three weeks at sea—a good prelude for a visit to Russia. The grey, monotonous North Sea, bleak and expressionless. Heavy fog and low clouds. The fog and clouds grew thicker as we sailed northwards—to Russia. It seemed as though the Arctic mist was helping to cloak that country of mystery in a fog which grew more opaque as we approached our destination. I have never seen a sea like it. Our convoy of forty ships, including thirteen warships and two aircraft carriers, sailed through the fogs, like a fleet of caravels of the Middle Ages, carrying discoverers in search of new sea lanes, truths or lands.

ARCHANGEL

For a whole day before reaching Archangel we ploughed our way through milky fog, as thick as cotton wool. The German reconnaissance aeroplane, which had spotted us on the previous day, could not hope to find us again. We were as safe under the screen of fog as we would have been under the best air umbrella ever made. Good, Russian fog. In the evening we noticed lights twinkling in the distance, very dimly and unsteadily. It was the shore, but on the following day we could not trace it again, for the Russian coast was swathed once more in impenetrable mist.

The fog cleared away about midday, in the most unexpected manner, disclosing a forest on both sides of the ship. There was an endless line of forest, low and monotonous. It was vast and boundless, filling the horizon and

leaving nothing else in sight. One sensed something gigantic and powerful behind the forest, but it concealed all, like a long wooden enclosure. It seemed to have been there always, like the sea and the fog. There was something absolutely final and permanent about it. I think that when the first white men sailed into Hudson's Bay they must have seen a world as wild, vast and primeval. It was difficult indeed to realise that the country we were approaching was geographically a part of Europe and the port for which we were bound was several centuries older than New York.

Both banks drew closer as we sailed up the estuary of the river Dvina. There were no fishermen's boats and sails in sight. The great river was empty and so were its banks, except for the forest. Only once did we see evidence of human civilisation; a large clearing in the forest, obviously cut by the hand of man, symmetrical in shape. It thrilled us like the footprint on Robinson Crusoe's island. In the middle of the clearing we saw a number of huge, long, low wooden buildings. They were too big for village houses, too uniform for farm buildings, too isolated for warehouses. Planted in the middle of the big clearing, these long buildings in the forest were a mystery, a secret which we were to learn much later.

As the banks of the river drew closer and closer, Archangel itself emerged from the forest, like a boat hidden in reeds. It is an incredibly fantastic harbour for the XXth century, for it is huge and entirely built of wood. It takes some thought to realise why the port struck us as very peculiar. We are used to concrete quays and jetties, stone embankments, cranes and derricks of steel. Try to imagine

all these things made of wood and timber, on a very big scale, stretching for miles and miles.

A mass of heavy timber driven into the river bed, and quays of wood built on their foundation. A shipbuilding dock of timber and in it the hull of a newly built ship, gleaming with yellow, fresh wood. Father Noah's shipyard, in which he built the predecessor of the Normandie and Queen Mary, was probably just like that.

The oldest ports in the world, the ports of the Mediterranean, were built of stone and so are the harbours of England. But travellers and chroniclers have recorded the existence of wooden ports on the southern shores of the Baltic in the VIIIth, IXth and Xth centuries of our era. The Arabian travellers and merchants in search of precious amber and furs, recorded in their memoirs that the seafaring Slavs at the mouths of the Vistula and the Elbe used to build ports, castles and temples of wood. There are no wooden ports in the Baltic of today and Soviet Archangel, innocent of stone, steel and concrete, seems to be the last, forgotten relic of that distant past.

There is wood in the forest, in the harbour and in its industries.

I would be guilty of great inaccuracy if I were to present only the archaic side of that most Russian of all doorways to Russia. There is also a modern, commercial, Soviet side. When the timber markets of the world were menaced about ten years ago by the dumping of Russian wood at undercut prices, Archangel became what it is today. As our ship plodded up the muddy stream, we saw what Archangel could mean to world timber trade. It is a gigantic warehouse. There are piles of logs and sawn boards several storeys high, in never ending rows. They

go on and on. The few houses, grey and ugly, look like insignificant cabins, dwarfed by the size of the timber stores.

It was a long time before we saw any people. At first—was it a symbol?—they passed unnoticed. Perhaps they were there already, invisible among the trees, when we saw only the great forest. Perhaps they appeared later. Amidst the huge piles of wood, in streets bordered by stacked timber rather than by houses, they stopped and stared. They seemed to be all alike. Both men and women wear the same kind of jackets, obviously warm, and the same high, workmen's boots. Their faces seem also alike. They are collected and uncommunicative. No one knows whether they are pleased or annoyed. It is even impossible to tell whether they are curious. They are strange people.

In all ports of the world people on the shore watching ships coming in do so with a certain kind of recognition. After many centuries of maritime trade and a century of invention, a strange ship coming into port is no longer completely strange. But we could not help feeling complete and utter strangers. People looked at us as others had looked at Spaniards, Dutchmen or Englishmen approaching unknown shores.

The first solid houses relieved pleasantly the monotony of the wooden landscape with specks of white. They were obviously old. We passed a well-placed house with an Adam porch with white pillars. There was another old house, with squat towers at every corner. On the other side of the water, some miles away, on the background of the forest, we saw a monastery. A typical Russian monastery, true to theatrical stage sets, to old caricatures and traditional ideas about old Russia. There were very

big and small domes, some high and some low. They were green, pear-shaped and bulbous. On each of them there was an orthodox cross. The walls of the monastery were white and the domes a vivid copper green. The huge building seemed to breathe strength and defiance. And yet it looked somehow out of place and exotic. We heard the wail of a factory siren. Then others took it up, dozens of them. The modern sawmills of the big city were calling each other.

Night succeeded the first day imperceptibly. It came unexpectedly, just as land had appeared behind the fog, just as the city had emerged suddenly from the forest. It was a typical Arctic night. Our ship was moored at some kind of wooden pier. Changing shifts of workmen were busy unloading the goods, under the guard of soldiers in greatcoats, with long, Russian bayonets on their rifles. On the walls of the customs house there was a poster of scarlet. In that grey world it looked like a red flower. It was the only thing to remind us of war. What a contrast with the shattered houses of Merseyside!

The night air was filled with a pleasant fragrance of freshly sawn wood. Distant sirens called in the dark, somewhere by the forest or by the monastery. They seemed to be keeping guard over the sleeping town. On the pier a deep, masculine, Russian voice half hummed a song. The song was very Russian, sombre and sonorous. I tried to understand the words, but the song ceased suddenly and all sank into silence.

2. *Above Russia*

THE forest which yesterday seemed to be a barrier, a natural "wall of China," has turned into a carpet, a meadow or prairie. It unrolls under our feet, on and on, endlessly. It reveals all its secrets, which seemed impenetrable a day ago. The aeroplane achieved it all. I do not know how it happened, but instead of going by railway—trains are said not to be very punctual here—we flew to Moscow in large air liners. It takes only four hours. The Lockheeds are not particularly comfortable, the aerodrome seemed to be an emergency one, but there were many aeroplanes on it and the anti-aircraft defence was impressive. It was a contrast with Archangel, which looks old, primitive and squalid. Most of the eminent visitors who came with us also went by air; Mrs. Charlotte Haldane, a typical example of an Anglo-Saxon woman, enthusiastic about the U.S.S.R.; Vernon Bartlett, physically the pure Dickensian type of Englishman; pensive and good natured Felix Topolski, the Goya of this war, whom Professor Kot took with him to Russia, to the disgust of the professional Polish diplomats; and many others. The group of British pilots who were with us on the ship went to Murmansk; their machines were unloaded from other ships in the convoy.

This might be an excellent opportunity for a detailed

description of a Soviet airport, a Soviet customs office and Soviet airmen. But it has been done before by others, so thoroughly that a new inventory would be quite superfluous. Customs offices, airfields and even airmen are the same all over the world. I am always amazed by the youthful expression on the faces of all pilots, even those who are no longer very young, and by something stern in their eyes even when they are still almost children. What is most interesting is Russia itself, spreading below like a meadow, a carpet, a prairie.

It is a strange sight. It is different from that of yesterday, but not less peculiar. The brown patch of Archangel and its timber yards has been long submerged in a green ocean. There are no more factories, sawmills or houses. There is again only a vast, impenetrable, endless forest, without roads or clearings. Impenetrable? Not really. Seen from the sea, it looked like a solid wall. Perhaps it was thicker there; here it is quite different. We fly very low, so that wherever there is even the slightest elevation, the tips of the trees come up nearly to the red stars on the wings of our aeroplane. One can then see even the shadow cast by the trees on the green, bushy undergrowth. The trees are thin and haggard. They have poor, miserable leaves, their trunks are gnarled and they huddle as though they were freezing. They are birches. They grow on brownish marshland, which seems poignantly familiar.

Narvik. Yes, Narvik, the Allied expedition of May, 1940. One's war memories are always fresh and vivid. I remember well the Norwegian forest, marshy even in the mountains, with sparse undergrowth on a background of yellow mosses growing in many layers. Ankenes,

Lynkenes, Haakvik. The shadow of the aeroplane glides over it. Somewhere we see the thin silver thread of a railway; it will guide us, like Ariadne; then a few grey houses lost in the forest. Then nothing. Thicker parts of the forest and empty, yellow-brown clearings covered with mosses succeeded each other monotonously, occasionally interspersed with lonely, white forest lakes. We flew over the forest for an hour and more. We were bored. I unfolded a map of Russia. The area over which we were flying was marked with the geographical sign denoting such marshland forests—and it was the size of Germany, France, Poland and the Balkans together. It was empty, untouched. In many other parts of the world people are crowded in small spaces. But the map of Russia unfolds towards Asia. It is like a gigantic glacier overhanging the Danube and the river Yang-Tse, Hungary and Japan. What an immense area. Why do we look so seldom at the map, why do we call a continent, a world with its own civilisation and way of life, why do we call it a country just as we speak of Belgium, Spain or Argentine? We flew into white mists. The wings of the aeroplane were wet with rain and they shook over air pockets as a car shakes on a bad road. Then we hit a wall of soft fog, like cotton wool. It acted as a narcotic. When I woke up again, the fog was thinning. The forest was still there, unchanged.

I once travelled in Russia, a long time ago. I was in one of the great Russian trains, which cross the whole continent. A Russian shared the compartment with me. On the first day of our journey I looked out of the window. The landscape was hopelessly monotonous: wooden houses, flat fields, birch trees.

On the morning of the next day, I awoke and looked out. Everything was the same as before. "Have we stopped overnight?" I asked.

"Not at all. We travelled throughout the night. Why did you think so?"

"The view has not changed in the least."

"Why should it change? It will be the same until we get to Moscow." Moscow was a day's journey away. I was amazed. The Russian smiled, with the calm superiority of knowledge.

"And what about the other side of Moscow?" I asked. "As far as the sea, Archangel, Murmansk? Is it still the same? Is it always, always *eta bieroza*, always birch trees?"

The Russian smiled with the benevolent smile of Buddha.

"*Da, bieroza, bieroza i bieroza.*"

This conversation of old times returned to me as I looked through the streaming window of the air liner. Birch and birch. Huge somnolent, deserted spaces. A sleeping world, in which there is so much room for future generations; in which the wealth of timber, elsewhere so eagerly exploited, rots away after long life, just as it did thousands of years ago, when Europe, barely free from ice, was also a waste of mosses and birch. This is the last reserve of what there was in the west, after the ice had receded, but before man had made his appearance.

You are a fortunate land, Russia! You are a country that lacks neither field, nor forest, nor steppe, nor high mountains, nor seas. You are a country of which war can ravage only the fringe, without touching the inner wealth; your forests can survive twenty years of revolution. What

need have you for another piece of land in the west?

At last the view below began to change. It was at first only a change of colour. The light green of the birch, with the mottled white of its bark, was replaced by the dark fir. The forest was still northern, but no longer Arctic. There were a few villages or settlements. The houses were wooden and grey, like those of our first day, and they were scattered with a strange disregard for distance and space. It all looked very different from the villages of the west, of France, Czechoslovakia, Germany or Poland, which always look from the air like a group of crystals, compact and symmetrical in design. The Russian houses, scattered widely and without a plan, recall the tents of nomadic tribes. They look as though they had been built on the site of tents spread during the great migrations. There are no churches. That is the most striking difference between the villages we see and the villages of old Russia. There are some large buildings, warehouses or schools—it is difficult to tell. Were the wooden churches demolished, or were they never built so far north? A river flows slowly, white between the green walls of the forest. Then there is waste again, with a few occasional villages. Here and there cattle grazing in the clearings hidden in the forest, scared by the roar of our engines. Another hour or so—and then the first town. We fly over something that has regular quarters divided by streets, still wooden and grey; then there is a white church. It is obviously damaged. Then there was a sight on the right that was worth going to the other side of the aeroplane.

On the green, slightly undulating meadow, on which the city lost in the forest was built, there was amidst wooden houses a quadrangle of stone walls. At every corner there

were round towers with strange, peaked roofs. Nowhere in Europe, from Naples to Edinburgh and from Braganza to Wilno, could one see such towers. They were quite different. There were two gates, surmounted by heavy domes; inside were three churches, sprawling, swollen and deserted. The wall, with holes for guns, was crumbling, but it still dominated the town, planted in its middle, like its Acropolis, its Capitol, its Alcazar. It was its Kremlin. I do not know the name of that town, nor its history. But I know that such a Kremlin might be found in Samarkand, in Bukhara, Lhassa, Chita. I know that it is a copy of a larger original, just as the acropolis of Greek cities from Sicily to Crimea were copies of the Acropolis of Athens, as the palaces of Central Germany, from Wurzburg to Dresden, were copies of the great Versailles. I could have found something similar in Tibet, in lands which had known nomadic empires born in the steppes. I could not have seen such a structure in the lands of the Vistula, hardly even in those of the Dnieper. There was an awesome beauty and strangeness in the unknown Kremlin. It was utterly alien and had a character of its own.

The forest was thinning out. It was succeeded by vast fields, the property of kolkozoes. I do not know whether the revolution penetrated into the forests, for they are vast and mysterious. But it certainly did penetrate wherever the plough was known. It brought the tractor. The country below was more thickly populated than before—there were villages and houses, with more large buildings,—probably communal stores or schools. Here and there corn was still stacked in the fields; in some places ploughing had started. There was again a railway line. Then we

saw something rather unexpected in the northern wilderness, the gleaming black ribbon of a motor road. Some factories scattered in the fields were puffing smoke busily. They looked brand new. In England, in Europe, factories generally look old. Suddenly we saw a growing accumulation of houses, streets and smoke. The aeroplane wheeled round in a banked turn, which revealed the vast size of the city. It was a maze of buildings, almost as large and as intricate as London. The contours were dimmed by mist and smoke. We headed for the airport which was vast and widespread. The buildings were camouflaged with the familiar pattern of dull colour. On the edge of the aerodrome there were anti-aircraft guns dug into the ground. They were the first reminder of war we had seen for many hours. Beyond the aerodrome and a broad avenue bordering it there was the city, swathed in white mist or smoke.

Three Soviet officers came up to our aeroplane. Two Polish officers left it with us. They froze for a second in a salute.

The name of the aerodrome recalls tragic memories of the last czar's coronation.

It is called "Chodynka."

My room in the Hotel National faces a small square, with the Kremlin on its other side. Of all the things I have ever seen none was more striking and original. I know only two royal castles that have achieved a personality of their own: the Spanish Escorial and the Kremlin. Both of them are inspired by a monastic conception, based on a religion, whereas Versailles is a drawing room and Potsdam a barracks. If one seeks a similarity between the nation beyond the Pyrenees and the nation of the Volga, it is

to be found in their national Arks of the Covenant. Unfortunately I did not know old St. Petersburg, somnolent, beautiful, European and reserved, but I know that it represented only the European and German veneer which Peter the Great and whole generations of Holstein-Gottorps masquerading as Romanovs imposed on Russia. No wonder that the capital returned to the city of the Ivans immediately after a socialist revolution. I think that a nationalist revolution would have done the same thing. I think that it would have been even more powerfully attracted by the Kremlin, with its pointed guard towers, rotund church domes and tall belfries.

I could see it all perfectly well from my window. On my right I saw a fine building in neo-classical style: the old riding school of aristocratic youth, now the garage of the Kremlin fleet of cars. In front of my window there was a red building, clumsily imitating Byzantium; a Pushkin museum, or something of that kind. Then the street widened into a vast, rectangular square, encircling the jagged wall of the Kremlin—the Red Square. I could not see Lenin's mausoleum, it was hidden by some scaffolding. But on the edge of my panorama I saw the coloured turbans of a building which looked like the setting for a film about the Thief of Baghdad, like an illustration to the tales of Scheherazade; a mass of domes, small and large, plain and twisted in spirals. Some looked like cut red crystal, others like the folds of a robe. They had nothing of the European balance and measure which characterise the cathedral of Cologne, St. Paul's, Oxford Renaissance and Roman Ravenna. Some of the Portuguese buildings recall this kind of splendour, they also bear the imprint of the East. But the style can be traced to Angkor and

India. It has the same luxuriant imagination and uncontrolled exuberance. One could easily believe that this Vasilij Blazennyj, the church of the blessed Basil, was erected in the XVIth century for the Great Mogul and designed in imitation of the art of his country. It was more difficult to believe that it had been erected by Italian architects, as a Christian church.

The sunset gilded its turbans with a golden gleam. The sunset was red and the mist rising from the river Moskva shone with a pale opalescent light. The towers studding the Kremlin's wall stood out with greater intensity than ever; they were dark, on a background of white.

I was tired and fell asleep very early, but I was awakened at 11 P.M. by a loudspeaker. I hastily turned off the light, because of the blackout, and I looked out. The night was moonless and dark. Only searchlights nervously fingered the sky. They seemed to be more powerful than the London ones. Sometimes they lowered their beams and then some fragment of the Kremlin, a tower or a church dome, glittered with a blue light. I heard rapid steps in the street below. The radio was playing the International; it was the close of the day's programme. The International played in the Moscow night had a soft tone, very different from the character it had assumed on days of demonstration, or in Barcelona and Madrid during the Civil War. It was rather a refrain repeated by the clocks of an old castle, a watchword called out from one tower to another by heralds guarding the walls of a mediaeval fortress. It was no longer the voice of Revolution; I heard in the dark Moscow night the voice of History.

3. *First Day in Moscow*

NO REVOLUTION: FATHERLAND

AT breakfast, in a hotel room recalling the best years of the great reign of Victoria, with a view of the Kremlin and Moscow in morning mist, I renewed after many years my old acquaintance with the Soviet press. It was like a meeting with old friends. There were *Pravda*, *Izvestia* and the organ of the army *Krasnaya Zvezda*, looking just as they did in the days of Lenin, when in the midst of the fiercest fighting he dealt in scores of articles with the problems of the Revolution. Before the first world war the Russian press was excellent. It stubbornly resisted censorship, it had a fine liberal spirit, prominent writers and skilful editors. After the revolution it had another glorious period of pioneering, militant writing. That period ended a few years ago with a series of trials and convictions, Karl Radek, Mihail Kolcov and others. Now I looked in vain for great names. There are still a few literary celebrities like Ehrenburg, Tolstoi, Shokholov, but the great revolutionary poet Mayakovski has no successors and the publicists of the revolution also seem to have died heirless. The golden age of individualism is over in the Soviet press and the iron age of levelling down has started. That is perhaps why the Russian press is more revealing. Writers of great talent are likely to present the situation as seen from their individual angle. Lesser

personalities cannot leave their mark on the general trend of thought. They reproduce it more accurately and dully.

I confess that I did not look in the press for news from the Kiev front, or from Smolensk, nor for any topical information. I looked for the permanent features of this war. The Soviet press is first and foremost an instrument of propaganda. It drives home its points by hammering repetition. It is therefore quite easy to find out what it wants to drive into Russian heads. The same things are repeated in the serial fiction, in the leading article, in headlines and in cartoons. I did not see the word Revolution very often; it has become a cliché. But the word Fatherland is everywhere. It was brought back from the past only a few years ago, but it returned stronger than ever. Here is a story about Suvorov, a poem about Suvorov and a poster with the picture of that Commander who received from the Tzar the title of Duke of Italy. Here is a story about Suvorov, Kutuzov and Alexander Nevski, all together. Alexander Nevski was, as far as I can remember, a saint of the Orthodox church and a kind of male Joan of Arc of Holy Russia. In the *Krasnaya Zvezda* there is an article about Bagration, Barclay de Tolly and again Kutuzov. In the theatre they are playing Glinka's patriotic opera—with the title, "Life for Our Tsar," changed to "Ivan Susanin," and the numerous ballet pieces left out. Somewhere in a corner of *Izvestia*, Karl Marx, rather embarrassed by the company, found a modest place. But he did not speak about capitalism and class struggle, only about the Prussians and their character. The British press, any free press, reflects all the trends of opinion. Here the press expresses only the policy of the State; which means the Kremlin.

I have finished my breakfast a long time ago. The waiter who brought my bill is a Methuselah of all waiters, as they all seem to be here. Their grandsons obviously preferred to be tractor drivers. Military lorries rumble along the broad avenue in front of the Kremlin. I put aside the newspapers; they had already revealed to me the atmosphere of the new war. It even has an official name: "The great socialist war for the Fatherland." But the adjective "socialist" seems rather out of place. Too many Suvorovs, Kutuzovs, Princes Pozarskis and Zabajkalskis have descended from old historical portraits, returning into the life of Russia. . . .

My first press review is over. I go out to see the city.

THE OLD, VERY OLD AND MODERN MOSCOW

After 1933—to some extent even before that date—Moscow, like Paris under Napoleon III, or Berlin after Sedan, went through its period of reconstruction. Some of its parts are now unrecognisable. The Revolution which turned the uneven peasants' acres into the huge steppe of the collective farm, showed the same ferocious zeal for destruction and construction in the cities. The Kremlin had been surrounded by garish Eastern bazaars, ugly but typical, by many smaller churches and chapels, some of them also ugly yet unique. All this was literally wiped off the face of the earth. The green boulevards encircling the older quarters of the city have disappeared and a ribbon of asphalt was put there instead. A new, broad street, named after Gorki, was pierced from the Leningrad road towards the Kremlin, crossing the old Twerska street. The houses on both its sides are big and have no style. There are some figures on the roofs, elaborate

balconies and heavy gates, all rather reminiscent of the red plush settees and brass inkstands of the last century. This is supposed to be the new Moscow style. I should have preferred something of le Corbusier. . . .

The beauty of old Moscow, the dethroned capital, was in the hundreds of its Byzantine domes, the Asiatic bazaars and the solemn Kremlin. Napoleon's march ravaged Moscow with fire, but his style—the Empire—compensated for the loss. No other capital has as many palaces with drives and classical columns as Moscow. The Revolution left them untouched, even the Napoleonic wreaths and proud eagles. But the old, fine English Club today houses the Museum of the Revolution and the pleasant, rustic manor which was the scene of old Tolstoi's *War and Peace* became the headquarters of the Writers' Club. Nearby is the smaller country house in Sadowa Street in which Tolstoi wrote his book. Another and still more modest manor with white pillars, among tall trees, is the birthplace of the great revolutionary Herzen. Each of these Empire houses is like an old chest of drawers, full of secret corners and hiding places, musty smells, sentiment and history.

This Moscow survived: it had dignity. A worse fate met another Moscow, less distinguished and newer. The aristocratic Moscow of the Tolstois, Syeremietievs and Naryshkins arose with its white columns in the early years of the XIXth century, but the other Moscow of the merchants Morozovs (sugar), Popovs (tea) and Putilovs (steel) was born in the last years of the century. There was a time when I disliked the "osobniaks," that is the residences of the rich merchants, tucked in the cul-de-sacs typical of Moscow, among vast gardens. They had the

intolerable gorgeousness of secession, the bad taste of the parvenu and were clumsy imitations of the Paris of fifty years ago. But I do not mind them any more. They belong to a world that is now part of history. The coarse, noisy and dynamic merchants are figures of the past, just as are the Counts Wronski and Princes Szczerbacki. Plaster peels off the walls of their villas of barbaric splendour, endeavouring in vain to keep up with modern trends, of days before 1900. Grass grows between the rough cobbles of the quiet alleys. High wooden enclosures still conceal the wide parks, all gone to weed. The wooden gates are slowly rotting and sagging. It is still the Russia of the melancholy Nicholas II.

Other nearby streets are already smooth with asphalt, widened and expressionless. The tall Soviet lorries rumble along incessantly, full of soldiers. Their greatcoats are rolled and slung across the back, just as they were in 1914. Their bayonets are long and thin, as in 1914. I cannot help thinking that they are the same men, the sons and younger brothers of those of 1914. They go to war obedient, disciplined and confident, as the others did.

On a poster, I see Soviet soldiers in attack. Over them looms a great mediaeval knight with a sword. It is Alexander Nevski, saint of the orthodox church, leading Russian soldiers against the German crusaders on the Czudski lake. Here is another poster, in colours of blood and fire. It is the dominant, leather faced figure of Suvorov, Duke of Italy. On the gate of some old church, closed and slowly collapsing, with weeds growing on its roof is a third poster. This time it is a Soviet hero of the civil war, Chapayev, popularised by an excellent Soviet film—a splendid Cossack ataman, with his fur cap at a jaunty

angle and a dashing moustache. He is a real hero of the Revolution. How unlike bearded Marx, scholarly Engels or pensive Lenin, and how like the men whose statues the Revolution pulled down, only to put them later on its posters.

IN THE TRACKS OF THE REICHSWEHR

The Polish Embassy nestles in one of the cul-de-sacs. It is a tall, dark house, built—as the Russians assured us—in Florentine style. It belonged to two brothers who hated each other so much that they divided the house into two entirely separate parts, with separate stables, kitchens, gates and everything. They vanished in the Revolution. Perhaps they had, like others, to live in one room with twenty people; maybe they took turns driving one taxi in Montmartre; maybe they shared a common grave in the days of the terror. Nobody knows. These smart Moscow residences are like empty shells on a beach—no one knows what happened to the mollusk that made and inhabited them.

The house had been rented by the Polish Embassy several years before the war. After September 17th, 1939, our personnel had to depart, leaving everything. When we returned two years later we found nothing except filth and large quantities of note paper with beautiful embossed headings of the eagle and swastika. “~~Der Deutsche~~ Militär Attaché,” “~~Der Deutsche~~ Luftattaché” and so on; German purchasing mission, German industrial office, etc. The traces of the German occupants of the house were fresh, almost warm. They had even left some food behind. They had stayed in Moscow until June 22nd. I do not know what these numerous missions were doing,

but I believe they all did one thing—espionage. The staff of the German embassy was said to number several hundred people. This may be an exaggeration, but it is a fact that the number of German agents in Russia was enormous.

We had to borrow furniture from some Russian office. The old Polish furniture of the Embassy had vanished; perhaps it was taken *zum Andenken* by the Deutsche Militär Attaché and the Deutsche Luftattaché? Many Poles were already camping in the ground floor rooms. They came from the Lubianki, the Butyrki, Lefortovo and from some other Moscow prison of which I forget the name.

There are some young boys deported from Bialystok to factories beyond the Ural; a priest who had been sent north of the Polar circle; a Jewish socialist who had been sentenced to death and waited in the condemned cell for 36 days—for the execution or the reprieve; a schoolmistress who spent two years in the land of the Jakutes in Siberia and many others. They looked like people rising from the grave and they all asked for one thing—a Polish eagle, the kind of eagle worn by the soldiers of Tobruk, Narvik and Scotland on their caps. These men and women heard the names of Polish battlefields in this war for the first time.

AIR RAID AND NIGHT CLUB

In the evening I experienced my first air raid in Moscow and saw the smartest night club in the U.S.S.R. I have no doubt as to which of the two would appear more thrilling to the average citizen of the Union, who hears tales of Moscow with the awed reverence of the faithful

listening to accounts of Mecca. For the 160,000,000 inhabitants of the Union it is a cross between Mecca, Paris and New York. It is a holy city as well as the city of light and the capital of progress. Few people can get there at all, fewer still are allowed to become residents. Moscow is also considered to be the acme of luxury. In Western Europe we are not easily impressed by hotel lounges and those who spent the winter of the blitzes in London have fairly high air raid standards. But the hotel keepers do not have to strain their powers very far to dazzle the good people of Moscow, and the Luftwaffe does not have to do its very worst to give them a real thrill.

I am sure that in my travels through the more remote parts of Russia more men, and especially women, will ask me to tell them about the legendary Moskva Hotel than about the Eiffel tower or the skyscrapers. That vast, shapeless building erected a few years ago next to the Kremlin, on the site of several demolished churches or bazaars, is the last word in Soviet luxury. It may not appear particularly exciting to Europeans, but to the Kazachs, Zyrians, Mordvians, and even Ukrainians, Great Russians and White Ruthenians, it means a great deal. Every room has a bathroom with running water which sometimes is even hot; there is a restaurant on the roof; the lifts can hold a dozen people at a time; there is a profusion of plaster and marble decorations everywhere.

It is a fortunate hotel among all others. The Ritzes, Waldorf Astorias and Imperials of the other capitals of the world offer in vain their marvels of comfort. They fail to impress people who have bathrooms, electric refrigerators and radios in their own houses. Each of them has competitors, striving to surpass them in luxury. Not

so the Moskva Hotel. It reigns supreme between the Baltic and the Pacific, between the White and the Black Seas.

There is one Party, one Kremlin, one Lenin's tomb and one Stalin. This new religion is basically monotheist. The principle is applied even on a smaller scale. In the only Moscow there is only one Park of Culture and Recreation, as famed in Soviet lands as the Gardens of Semiramis were in the ancient world. In that only city there is one night club, in the only hotel—the Moskva. If in any other country youth whispers about a night club with such awe-struck admiration and hushed curiosity, I have to see it.

I am afraid that the evening's entertainment struck me as a good deal duller than others which I had seen in thousands of similar places elsewhere. The jazz band was particularly noisy and raucous. The service was slow and the food indifferent. But the public itself was interesting enough to make up for such shortcomings. There were about a hundred tables in the large room; half of the people present were in uniform. The "komandirs" of the Red Army enjoyed shashlik of mutton, chashoshbili, Crimean wine and apples of Alma Ata. Gingerly, rather clumsy in their cavalry boots, they danced foxtrots and tangoes on the circular floor in the middle of the room. That was not dull, far from it.

I went there with some Polish communists who came to Russia after 1939 and seemed rather disappointed with what they found there. One of them was the Deputy of Wilno in the Soviet parliament; even under Soviet occupation the city to which the Lithuanians laid so many claims returned a Polish representative. We spoke Polish. After a while a young Soviet lieutenant joined us at our

table. His mother was Polish. Before the Revolution, like many other Poles, she had sought employment in Russia. The lieutenant spoke affectionately about his mother and he was interested in her country. He was wearing the order of the Red Flag. He was on leave from the Smolensk front. He asked me to tell him about America, Britain and their armaments, about supplies and other things. He was like a child, pleasant, inquisitive, naive, logical. Children are more logical than adults.

Our table was quite near to the dancing floor so that we saw the dancing couples at close quarters. There were many airmen with blue patches on their collars. Almost everyone wore decorations, sometimes several of them, brand new and fresh from the mint. I recalled the official organs, *Izvestia*, *Pravda* and *Krasnaya Zvezda*, which I had been reading in the morning. Their first pages were filled with announcements of nominations, decorations and promotions, just as the first page of the London Times used to be full of advertisements. The front pages of the Soviet newspapers became a factory for the mass production of heroes and leaders. There is a decoration carrying with it the title of "Hero of the Soviet Union" and numerous practical privileges. I saw on the dancing floor several men wearing its insignia; a golden Soviet star on a red ribbon. Someone said that seven such heroes were present in the room. There may have been even more; it's difficult to notice people in a crowd. We are in good company.

I felt a surge of sympathy for those men in heavy boots, ugly navy blue breeches and simple military tunics, dancing in the Moscow night club. Every army has its type of officer. The Prussian type was probably the

most strongly defined, the most military and the most offensive. The British one, even after the recent changes, still bears the mark of the Eton and Harrow tradition.

The Soviet type is entirely different. It is very simple, even austere. Such were, in Standhal's vision, the officers of the French Revolution, in tattered uniforms and shabby boots, who swooped down the valleys of Lombardy. The Soviet uniform resembles closely the field dress of the Russian army of the last war, with Soviet insignia on the collar and the hammer and sickle on its buttons. It is certainly the least glamorous army in the world. The officers' faces are coarse, common and young. They are very young. They are peasants' faces. It is impossible to imagine seeing such faces among Oxford undergraduates, Boul' Mich intellectuals or City clerks—to say nothing of British army regulars. But nothing could be easier than to visualise that colonel as a farm labourer, this lieutenant as a coal hewer or that major as a gamekeeper. The human material of the army is simple and primitive, with more brawn than brain and nerves. I think that some of these men would fit perfectly the pattern of Hitler's and Goering's dreams. They are not all blond, though one sees many fair, long headed Nordics, Carelians or Great Russians. They dance the unending tango with the clumsy correctness of carefully trained animals, conscious of their strength.

The lieutenant brought along his friends. We put two tables together. Each of them introduced himself by telling us his name and a few personal facts. The major, for instance, had been in Poland in 1939, not a particularly pleasant recommendation for us. He greatly admired Polish towns. The towns occupied by the Rus-

sians were among the poorest in Poland, but their modest prosperity seemed very impressive when contrasted with Soviet squalor, just as the night club appeared a marvel of luxury to people who had never seen one before. The colonel came from Odessa, which was still fighting at the time. He had taken part in the occupation of Bessarabia; what splendid towns! I know that it was the most backward and primitive province of Rumania. I was glad that none of the Red Army officers present had been in Latvia or Estonia, where the standard of living was on the Scandinavian scale. It might have encouraged some meditation on the respective merits of socialism and capitalism, rather unhealthy for good Bolsheviks. The Soviet officers asked many questions. How great are the British armaments? How many first line aircraft has America? Why, if she has such a powerful industry, is America so poorly armed? What has she been doing in the last few years? I am afraid my interlocutors must have been disappointed. I did not know the number of first line aircraft in America, nor did I know what the Americans had been doing during the last few years and why. These questions were probably asked not by Soviet officers alone.

It was getting distinctly hot. Drops of perspiration appeared on the faces of the dancing men; they sweated heavily, like harvesting peasants. The women, in gowns which would be judged very plain by western standards, looked rather pale and expressionless. The technique of beauty parlours was obviously a long way behind Elizabeth Arden and Helena Rubinstein, and dress designers still had a good deal to learn from Paris. The men certainly had more character, a more clearly defined type than the women. The women looked like a crowd of work-

ing girls leaving the factory after eight hours at the conveyor belt, greyish and soiled.

The tango was finished and the band started to play a new tune. It was Russian, a kind of gipsy romance. One of the musicians sings it, or rather recites through a tube. The couples on the floor go on dancing, but they gradually pick up the song.

Razkinulos morje sziroko
I wolny buszuje w dali
Towariszcz my jediem daliooko
Po dalsze od naszej ziemi

The room is still that of the Hotel Moskva, a noisy dancing club. But the scene is no longer common or dull. The Russians sing. They are one of the most musical nations. Those army men, looking as though they had just come from the plough, sang with full voices. They like the tango, just as they like Ford cars and wireless, but this song is something of their own. They carried it on through many stanzas. It was the story of a ship's stoker who fell ill on board ship. His comrade urged him to get up and work. But he was very weak. He died. The mother waited at home in vain. "*Jej skazut, ona zaridajet,*" ends the song. "They told her and she wept." There is not the slightest trace of the erotic. There is in that song only the sea, melancholy and a mother.

It seemed to me again at that moment that the new Red Army is really like the old one.

AIR RAIDS AND SHELTERS

The air raid warning provides a perfect conclusion to our evening; otherwise we might have had to endure

another tango. The Soviet sirens are soft in tone, but penetrating, rather like the call of an owl, but then what air raid warning is pleasant? The room was soon empty. We had been instructed before that the use of shelters in Moscow is compulsory, as in Berlin. We have the choice of the hotel shelter or the underground. I voted for the latter.

The underground is, of course, one of the marvels of the capital of the Union, alongside the Park of Culture and the Moskva Hotel. It has a few lines and it cannot be compared in extent with the underground railways of Paris, New York or London. It was built a few years ago, as a show piece of the socialist Mecca. The stations are not ordinary underground stations, but a cross between a temple and a dancing hall. The walls are panelled with alabaster, marble or black granite. The lights are strong, but without glare. There are stone mosaics here and there. The whole is impressive, though not in the best of taste. We met at the entrance a crowd streaming down into the station, obviously preferring it to their home shelters.

There is no doubt that the Russians did a better job of converting the underground to a communal shelter than our decadent West; no trains run at night. I saw many people sleeping peacefully on improvised wooden beds. The human stream passed the train and entered the tunnel. We followed the others, walking along the rails, and feeling rather like the first Christians in the Roman catacombs.

After walking fairly deep into the pit, the people began to stop and lie down as they best could. The spaces between the rails were covered with wooden boards. They were thin, so that they bent under the weight of many

bodies. Sleeping on them was not too comfortable, unless one had brought some cushions. Unfortunately I had with me only the *Izvestia* with its six pages. I should have preferred the Sunday N. Y. Times.

Everything was organised efficiently. The idea of segregating the children from the adults and giving them the best places was certainly right; the tunnels were not overcrowded; the stations were left clear. The public was disciplined and orderly. Ventilation was satisfactory and the lights were dimmed so as not to disturb the sleepers. My companions and I had a few hours sleep, but we were awakened at four in the morning. The all clear had been sounded and everyone was leaving the shelters. The children were still asleep; apparently they did not think it worth while to wake them at such an hour.

The organisation of the air raids by the Germans was not nearly as efficient as that of the shelters by the Russians. The few air raids we witnessed in Moscow were a trifling matter compared to the London blitzes of the previous year. The roar of the Dorniers' engines was heard in the distance, as though they were unable to penetrate to the centre of the city. One heard the fire of the Soviet guns, but hardly any bomb explosions. Returning home before dawn we looked in vain for the red glare of fires. The sky over Moscow was black and the night silent.

We were told that the removal of debris was carried out very skilfully by special working teams. A house hit by a bomb was surrounded by a wooden enclosure, like one around a house that is being built; then the ruins were cleared quickly and thoroughly. In one of the Moscow squares there is a statue of Timiriazev, a Russian inventor. He stands upright on a high foundation. During one of

the raids the statue was knocked down by the blast of a near hit. It was back on its pedestal within twenty-four hours. There are in Russia dolls with a weighted base which invariably stand up no matter how much they are knocked about. They are called "Wanka-wstanka"—which means more or less "Johnny-get-up-again." That's what Timiriazev's statue is now called.

The good organisation of shelters is an important thing. Other countries did not get such results at their first try. It proves that the Russians anticipated war and that they had been carefully preparing for it.

THE MOSCOW OF THE FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS

On the following day I attended my first press conference. Assistant People's Commissar Lozovski was officiating. Several silent members of the Narkomindiel (Foreign Office) were busy around him, like priests assisting a bishop, celebrating a particularly important mass. Felix Topolski was making sketches of everyone.

Lozovski, who since the war became one of the best known Soviet personalities, like Dietrich in Berlin, is an old Bolshevik who had once been the head of the international of communist trade unions—a very amusing anachronism in present Soviet conditions. He is a typical elderly gentleman from a Paris café, with tousled grey hair, calm, sad eyes, and a small beard. He looked exactly like a French socialist of the time of Jaures. He talked softly, sleepily. The Conference was usually opened by his reply to some recent German statements. The retorts were rather *vieux jeu*, calm, ironical, with quotations from the entire world literature. There was nothing of the bru-

talities of German declarations, nothing of the blatancy of modern propaganda.

The god, or rather the prophet of Soviet information, was nevertheless a great nuisance from the point of view of the foreign correspondents. The room in ancient Greek style—for Lozovski received in the house of the Greek Legation, with which the Soviet had broken diplomatic relations some months before—was full of aces of international journalism, mainly from Britain and America. They were famous correspondents, representing great newspapers. They had been in Abyssinia, Spain, France. Now they were in Moscow and they were having a bad time. The Soviet authorities, always extremely suspicious of foreign journalists, had doubled their precautions. They did not show them anything. They told them nothing. They rationed news to the utmost limit.

But not altogether.

"Perhaps some of you would like to see a kolhoz near Moscow?" Lozovski asked sweetly.

A kolhoz, especially near Moscow, is no longer an attraction. Lozovski's offer left everyone cold.

"When will there be a visit to the front?" asked someone by way of reply.

"There will be one when we can have it," said Lozovski with the same benevolence.

Total war put an end to the golden age of war correspondents, which we all still remember. In Madrid, in 1936, one could go to the front as one liked, with no other inconvenience than the risk. Here there are no front tours, except very cautious ones. Nobody is allowed to see more than the front zone, with some gutted villages, prisoners and second line formations. Nobody really saw

the front. This may be justified on military grounds, but the correspondents hate it. They are reduced to being a small, isolated ghetto, stewing in its own juice.

Exasperated, they sometimes try to sting Lozovski with poisoned darts.

"Mr. Lozovski, how much truth is there in the German radio report to the effect that Marshal Budienny has been executed in Stalingrad?"

The Soviet entourage of Lozovski staggered. Such a question, if asked by an ordinary Russian citizen, might cost him a great deal. But Lozovski remained as impassive as ever.

"I don't know anything about it and neither does Marshal Budienny. Are there any other questions?"

Nobody felt like asking again. Everyone went out, slightly bored. They had had their daily ration of news. All went to the Metropole, the journalists' hotel; there was Philip Jordan of the News Chronicle, dark Cholerton of the Daily Telegraph, Lovell of Reuters, Alexander Werth of the Times, Sulzberger of the New York Times, some Spaniards, a Chinese woman, two Japs and a Negro by the name of Homer.

Only one of us got all he wanted; Topolski. His pencil had never stopped throughout the conference. He did not care much for Lozovski's statements or the correspondents' questions. He caught beautifully Lozovski's Parisian, last century goatee, his smile, his type. He is satisfied. He does not have to attend any more conferences.

A lucky man.

4. *Returned to Life*

IN the corridors of the Polish Embassy, in its unfurnished waiting rooms and offices, there are—standing or camping—people whose very appearance recalls the epic of Dante. They have lost flesh and gained years, their faces are earthy, grey, their eyes burn and sparkle with fever. They have returned from far indeed. Some of them came from the Lubianka, which is half a mile away, next to the Kremlin, just like that old Venetian jail which was divided from the Palace of the Doges only by a narrow canal. Some are from the labour camps near Archangel, in the Komi republic, beyond the Arctic Circle, or from the Kirgizian steppes. But they are all from the no news land that lies between life and death.

They are interesting people. We can find among them ex-premiers of Poland, generals, Polish princes and Jewish socialists, priests and rabbis, peasants and squires, working men and revolutionary poets. They all belong to the great mass of people deported by the Soviet government deep into Russia during the nineteen months of the occupation of the Polish provinces. The Polish-Soviet pact, as a result of which we are in Moscow, gave them back their freedom. The people we saw at the Embassy were certainly a kind of elite of prisoners. The total number of deported persons was about two millions. It

amounted to 15% of the population of the provinces occupied by the Russians. A tremendous police machine was required to deport such a mass of people within less than two years.

I did not look at those people from the point of view of the sufferings they had endured. They did not think about it themselves; from general to private, from prince to peasant, they were firmly convinced that the most important task in the world was to defeat the Germans. The national discipline of those people was amazing. Two things particularly struck me. Those people had spent a long time in Russia. They had for prison company Soviet generals and admirals, aircraft designers and engineers, eminent writers, communists of the Civil War period—all those that were the Gironde of the Russian Revolution and shared the tragic fate of the other Gironde. They saw from below what we are seeing from the surface.

The scale of the deportation was very significant in itself. Everyone knows that whenever there is such a radical change of government, especially coupled with a change of the political control of a territory, some people leave prisons and others take their place. That is what happened when the Soviet armies occupied Lwow and Wilno, but I am afraid that the number of people they released was infinitely smaller than the number of those they imprisoned. When fully 10% of the population lost its freedom and was deported to Asia or to the country of the reindeer, nobody could pretend that it was a treatment reserved for the small class of feudal landowners, capitalists and bourgeois. The victims were too numerous.

It is important to consider the scale of the deportation and its motives. It is all the more important as Poland was

not the only country affected. The Rumanian Bessarabia and Bukovina, also occupied by the Soviet forces, and Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, were dealt with in a similar manner. But that was not all. In the Arctic North, in eastern Siberia, everywhere, the Poles released from labour camps left there Latvians, Rumanians and others who continued to fell trees or to build railway embankments in the icy marshes of the north. The conditions in the camps are terrible and mortality extremely high. But these camps had existed for many years before 1939. They were then filled with Ukrainians, White Ruthenians or members of the Caucasian nations, deported during the process of collectivisation, or charged with separatist tendencies. It is noteworthy that those parts of the Soviet Union which either had known some western influence, or had a pronounced national consciousness, were the most reluctant to accept the reforms. Collectivisation was more acceptable on the Volga than on the Dnieper and easier on the eastern than on the western side of the Ural. All resistance was crushed with the ruthlessness which is a Russian tradition, doubled by revolutionary fervour.

The policy of deportations, as well as the whole Soviet system of political imprisonment, are the logical consequences of a revolution which actually changed the whole social structure of a country and condemned whole classes—considered as “socially harmful”—to death, elevating others to the highest position. It is one of the aspects of the process which increased within a quarter of a century the number of industrial proletarians in Russia from a couple of millions under the tzars to about thirty millions today. The population of the towns increased by sixteen millions; the priests disappeared and tractor

drivers became a new class; thousands of churches vanished, like candles blown out by a storm; small Asiatic nations, hitherto hardly aware of their own existence, received at one stroke alphabet, grammar and literature. Soviet Russia liquidated not only the tzar, the church, the old bureaucracy, the landed aristocracy and the young Russian capitalism; it also suppressed the prosperous farmers, because they did not want collective farming. It liquidated completely the independent craftsman and the small tradesman, as well as the old educated class which was replaced with a brand new one.

In the course of the liquidation, the Bolsheviks soon realised that the members of the "liquidated classes"—scientific terminology is popular in Soviet politics—are likely to return to their old occupations if they are left in the same localities. They are also likely to become the most implacable opponents of the regime which ruined their lifework. "A weed torn out and left about grows roots again" was a proverb which became a political watchword.

Russia has in the north and in Asia enormous territories of desert steppe or forest. They were used for the mass deportation of "liquidated" people, either as prisoners or as compulsory settlers. Old Russia knew the system perfectly well and practised it on various "revolutionaries," such as court favourites in disgrace, like Biron in the XVIIIth century; and later the liberal aristocrats known as the *Decabrists* in the middle of the XIXth century, the *narodovolcy*, *esers*, *bolsheviks* and others. The same method was reserved for certain sects, the non-conformists of the Orthodox Church, such as the *Raskolniks* and the Old Believers, and finally for Poles after each of their national insurrections. The population of Siberia is

descended from convicts and deported persons to a far greater extent than that of Australia. The Poles of Lwow, sent in 1940 to Irkutsk and beyond, found whole settlements of Ukrainians deported at the time of the collectivisation of agriculture. They also found many Polish names among the natives of Siberia and in the cemeteries they saw Polish graves of other generations. It was not a new journey, rather a return to old tradition. Before, people were sent to Siberia if their ideas did not conform with the official dogmas of Russian absolutism. Now they are deported not only for independent thinking, but also for following certain occupations. A small money-lender of Baranowicze, who lent trifling sums to the peasants at a high rate of interest, or perhaps traded in livestock,—to say nothing of a timber merchant—had as good a chance of getting to the Soviet Guyane as the landowner and count. A well-to-do Ukrainian farmer from Polish Volynie shared the fate of the lawyer who had dealt with his lawsuits. The owner of a small house with a few tenants, was as likely to be deported as the big industrialist. Some of them went to Lubianka, that Russian Bastille, others were sent to labour camps or forced to take up residence in a place 150 miles away from the nearest railway station; but they were all deported.

Certain classes of specialists, technicians and skilled workmen were ordered to move deep into Russia. It was a migration on a gigantic scale, recalling ancient times. The mass of Polish Jews who took part in it were probably reminded of the sojourn of their ancestors in Babylon.

As I write, I see again all the people who filled our Embassy in Moscow in those early days. There is General Anders, who is now at the head of the "army of criminals"

as they called themselves, for most of its members had just left prisons. A tall, handsome man, he could be a credit to a crack cavalry regiment of any country. He was wounded eight times in various wars and collected all the ribbons that count. In September 1939 alone he was wounded three times. Born in Russia, he speaks the language beautifully, perhaps better than many of the new Russians, whose speech is frequently marked by provincial dialect. A week ago he was a prisoner at the Lubianka; today a guest at the official Moskva Hotel. Many people in this country made the short journey in the opposite direction.

Prince Eustachy Sapieha, sometime Polish Foreign Secretary—he signed the Polish-Russian Treaty of Riga in 1921—then Polish minister at the Court of St. James, is an aristocrat and landowner of Eastern Poland. Several of his ancestors were ambassadors to the Court of the Ivans and Peter the Great. Most of the Sapieha fortune, equal to many a sovereign state of Germany, was confiscated by Catherine and Nicholas I. He was condemned to death, reprieved, sent to a labour camp, and is now delivered by the Polish-Russian pact.

Wiktor Alter and Henryk Ehrlich are quite a different couple. They are leading members of the Bund, the Jewish socialist party, which was active in Poland. They had conducted long discussions with the Bolsheviks, their brothers in Marx. Some of these internal socialist feuds are fierce indeed; they have the intensity of the heresies and schisms of the early Christians. After the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact between Germany and Russia, they cried: "Treason." These Jewish socialists were among the first people to be arrested by the Russians in Poland. Ehrlich

is the classical type of a pensive, nineteenth century European liberal, cultured and sad. His father-in-law, the Jewish historian Dubnow, remained in Riga under the Nazis.

Alter is vivacious and emotional, aggressive and unrestrained. He has the brain of a mathematician, a mediaeval scholar and a Talmudist—which, I should imagine, comes to nearly the same thing. He turned that rabbinical brain of his to the study of social problems and Marx. In the prison he went—for some reason or other—on a hunger strike. He was forcibly fed. "Very painful, forced feeding," he said. He was the only man to keep his mental alertness in prison and not to become, even for a moment, a ghost of himself.*

Count Tyszkiewicz was the subject of special interest to his jailers. He had never had anything to do with politics, but it was impossible to convince the Bolsheviks that the title of count does not carry with it in the west some important and mysterious function of State. Tyszkiewicz was therefore endlessly questioned. Every word he said was carefully weighed for its supposed hidden meaning.

The inquisitor's patience was finally rewarded.

"Where is your wife?" asked the Soviet judge.

"In Italy," replied Tyszkiewicz.

"What is she doing there?"

"She is staying with relations."

"What relations?"

"Her uncle and aunt."

"What do they do there? How do they make a living?"

Poor Tyszkiewicz was getting rather uneasy and his

* Rearrested three months later, the two Jewish socialists were condemned to death and executed for "having helped Hitler."

embarrassment only spurred the judge to greater efforts. He pressed the prisoner to answer.

"Well, they have some money of their own . . . and the government helps a bit. . . ."

"So they are officials, eh? Perhaps also counts?"

"N-no, not exactly. . . ."

"Who are they then?"

"The King and Queen of Italy."

Tyszkiewicz, who is no liar, told me afterwards that the judge immediately left the room. Counts and royal cousins are a lost species in Russia. The prisoner was left alone, to meditate on family matters.

After a while the "sledovatjel" (judge of enquiry) came back, with a changed countenance, respectful and rather awed. He sat down gingerly and asked a new question:

"How do you address the King?"

"Majesty," replied Tyszkiewicz, whose wife, daughter of the Duke of Leuchtenberg, brought him the connection with the Queen of Italy, so embarrassing on that occasion.

"And the Queen?"

"Auntie."

"How that can be?" the *sledovatjel* marvelled at the laxity of court etiquette.

The poet Broniewski was one of the most pleasant old friends I found in Moscow. In Poland, where he had distinguished himself in action during the last war, he was regarded as the communist poet number one and one of the leading poets of his generation. I think he was not really a communist in the eyes of Moscow. He was actually a revolutionary writer, with great sympathy for Soviet Russia and a dislike for the church and feudalism, coupled

with strong patriotism. A few months after the occupation of Eastern Poland by the Soviet forces he was arrested. Now he had left prison, broken and depressed. I think that a sojourn in a Soviet jail is far worse morally for one who regarded himself as a communist than for one who had always hated the Soviet system.

These men told me many things. They had suffered much, and yet I never detected in their words any sympathy for Hitler, who was breaking down with his panzers the country which was their prison. I will never forget how the Polish general, who had suffered terrible indignities in prison, the Polish aristocrat, who had been condemned to death, and the Polish Jew, violently opposed to the present stage of the communist party, asked me with anxiety whether the reports about German advances in the Ukraine were true and whether I believed in the success of the Soviet defence. I doubt whether our times have seen a finer example of sacrifice of self for a great cause than that of those men and of all Poles in Russia.

5. *Muscovite Autumn*

IT so happened that during the last few years I have spent the autumn in one of the European capitals menaced by the same kind of danger as that which now threatens Moscow. I was in Madrid in 1936, when Toledo had fallen and the armies of General Franco, with their Moorish soldiers, German tanks and Italian aeroplanes, were creeping closer and closer from Illescas, Guadalajara and Guadarrama. I was in Prague in 1938, when Chamberlain was on his way to Godesberg, and Munich was not far away. A year later I was in Warsaw, hammered by German guns at night and by German bombers in daylight. The next autumn was that of London in 1940, and now Moscow. All these experiences had something in common, though no two capitals and no two years were alike. Still, I had opportunities for comparison when the eastern front was drawing closer to Moscow in the autumn of 1941.

I saw days of panic in Madrid and I saw Warsaw grow empty in one day. I know that there is no capital in the world that would not disclose some germs of fear when faced with imminent danger. The difference is in the manner in which the germs are kept under control. London was more self-possessed than the other capitals. I do not know whether it was, as the Germans alleged, mere

"lack of imagination," a certain type of mental training, or the fact that the danger was only aerial that was responsible for London's sang froid. At any rate it was there. Moscow is not different from other capitals in that respect. The germs of panic are there. One hears fantastic rumors about great German successes and Soviet defeats, which are later denied. There is, however, no doubt that the front draws nearer every day. There is a rush to buy whatever can be bought. The Moscow stations for east-bound trains are overcrowded. People camp there day and night waiting for trains. There are more and more troops in the streets, and they are not peacetime soldiers; they bear the mark of war. But all these symptoms are milder than they had been elsewhere. The panic, which lasted several days in Madrid, which seized only certain limited circles in Warsaw, was anticipated and controlled in Moscow. The governing machine was prepared to deal with it immediately. There are in the papers brief but significant notices about the introduction of summary military jurisdiction in the city and about the first sentences, which were promptly carried out. Every symptom of panic is being ruthlessly repressed. In Madrid and in Warsaw, which proved their spontaneous heroism, the bacilli of panic were fought and subdued by antibodies, present in the psychological constitution of the community itself; by the phagocytes of heroism. In Moscow the organism has no time to react, for at the very first symptom it gets a hefty dose of medicine guaranteed to kill every trace of political insubordination.

This medicine has several components; every newspaper contains patriotic poems and lofty appeals to arms, side by side with grim lists of executions. The press carries

out a double part. There are very long lists of persons decorated for merit and of others shot for cowardice. I must admit that the former are far more numerous than the latter.

Early autumn is beautiful in Moscow and lends some charm to the streets of the capital in war fever. One of the symptoms of the fever is interesting, the large scale sales of books. Those who are evacuated—for evacuation, after all, proceeds steadily and every day some government department leaves for a distant and unknown destination—sell all they can before their departure. The wealth accumulated in the lifetime of a member of the Soviet educated class is not very impressive. In spite of many housing schemes, living accommodations are still extremely scarce; a flat of a few rooms is used by several families. They have some furniture, some clothes and a lot of books. The furniture cannot be evacuated; the clothes are the most precious possession of all; only the books can be sold. The second-hand bookshops and the street book-carts are now full of bargains. This is fortunate, for it is usually very difficult to buy books in Russia, even books published only a few months or six weeks ago. A book is sold out and disappears in the vast mass of readers soon after publication.

The Russians have always been keen readers, provided they were not illiterate, and illiteracy was considerably reduced under Soviet rule. Moreover, books are one of the very few things on which one can spend money in Russia. Most of the other comforts or pleasures which money can—or could—buy in other countries are simply not available. The bare necessities of housing, clothing and food are there, but austerity is the rule. The cost of books

was an important item in the modest budget of a Soviet citizen. Now, when he was to leave town, the books are the first to be sold. I see in the bookshops beautiful editions of Russian classics and fine, well illustrated world classics. I bought a lovely edition of "The Thousand and One Nights" with reproductions of original Persian illustrations, and a splendid "Don Quixote." The new war has not yet had time to produce its own literature. There is, however, a play by Afinogenov, a Soviet writer, married to an American, who was killed in one of the raids on Moscow. The play was written in anticipation of war. It is called "On the Eve." The author sensed the approaching war, but he wrote his play, staged in the borderlands of Russia, in such a way as to provide for all the unexpected vagaries of world politics.

The evacuation of the theatres is rumoured from time to time, but they still continue to serve the great Russian dramatic art. Their steady functioning has undoubtedly an important effect on public morale, no less than the patriotic appeals and the summary executions. In Madrid the uninterrupted running of the municipal trams even in the days of wildest panic had a very calming effect. In London the behaviour of all those who carried on "business as usual" helped a great deal. The theatres are playing to full houses, with the many uniforms, including field ones, as the only reminder of war. I have seen the Soviet theatre at different times and I must say that, like the Soviet architecture, I much prefer the work of the early days to what followed it. I preferred the theatre of Meyerhold, which shocked so many critics, to the slavish attention to detail which is now known in Russia as "realism." But there is no doubt that the Russian theatre

has greatness. The Soviet theatre plays mostly dramatic adaptations of Balzac's novels—presenting a fascinating picture of the French provincial bourgeoisie under Louis Philippe, or of Leo Tolstoy's—picturing the Russia of squires, officers and courtiers at the time of the Congress of Berlin. Only Chekhov's play "The Three Sisters" brought a topical atmosphere, something like that of a Russian Ibsen. It is hard to tell which epoch the Russian artists portray better, the French of Balzac or the Russia of the Karenins and Wronskis. Some theatres are playing historical pageants with a lot of stage sets, costumes and harangues. The subject is invariably the campaign of 1812, bloodthirsty Napoleon, pale Alexander, suspicious Bagration, sensible Barclay de Tolly, the patriotic peasants, the rapacious Frenchmen and—as on the posters and everywhere else—the heroic, wise, infallible Kutuzov, Kutuzov and Kutuzov over and over again.

I never like plays of that kind in any country, so there is no reason why I should like them here. No attempt has been made to introduce any kind of plot; it is simply a sequence of political appeals, propaganda and analogies. The tempo is brisk, thanks to the revolving stage, which is ideally suited to that kind of spectacle. It is no more than a series of historical canvases, sometimes even modelled on the works of great painters. The public enjoys it all tremendously. It is a kind of theatre that clothes the war in bronze. The Moscow cinemas present pictures of the same type. It seems that for a nation with an imagination as vivid as that of the Russians, it is an effective method of propaganda. When on the following day a brief communiqué reports: "After heavy fighting our forces evacuated Kiev," the newspaper reader thinks

that things were worse in 1812 and yet that war was ended successfully. The audiences at those patriotic performances are composed mostly of the educated class of town-dwellers, the type of people most susceptible to panic and sensitive to suggestion. The Soviet press, that watchful instrument of political control, had thought fit to address certain warnings and threats to the intelligentsia. It is therefore natural that its morale needs stiffening by heroic pageants.

The most comforting sight, however, is that of the countryside. Some days ago I visited one of the kolkhozes some forty miles from Moscow, in the direction of Riazan. We also saw a couple of villages. Normal work was going on everywhere. What we have seen was not wonderful at all and it is obvious that even the best Soviet farms have still a long way to go before they can equal the efficiency of Western European agriculture. I must say that one of Knickerbocker's books, in which he compared the living conditions of the peasants in U.S.S.R. with those of the peasants in the countries which formerly belonged to Russia was quite convincing and accurate. Nevertheless some progress has been achieved in the eastern provinces of Russia.

The livestock, poultry and vegetable gardens looked quite well. It seemed that the most notable improvement has been achieved in the care of children. They all attended school and received meals there. It was all very primitive and poor, but fairly clean and decent. The fact that 40 out of the 200 families in the village had been "liquidated" as Kulaks (well-to-do farmers) gave a measure of the extent of the struggle and sacrifice entailed by

the forcible collectivisation. There is no reason to think that we were shown one of the less advanced kolkhozes. One of the foreign correspondents in our party noticed that the door of a chicken run was made of an old iconostase from the church. The church itself had been turned, of course, to some other use. There was no shortage of wood in the neighbourhood and it seems that the use of the iconostase in the chicken run was motivated by a kind of deliberate hostility to religion, similar to that which came to the surface in Spain.

Among the buildings of the kolkhoz there was a large stable gutted by German incendiary bombs during a night raid. We also saw the effects of bombing in other villages. The German bombers, kept outside Moscow by its anti-aircraft defences, try to destroy railway lines and set villages on fire. They catch fire easily, being mostly built of wood, but the damage is seldom widespread, because the Russian villages are far more scattered than those of Europe. Nevertheless this sort of thing might well upset the peasants. Actually it does not have the slightest effect and the country is perfectly calm. There is no exodus to the east. The normal work of the season has been delayed, but is progressing steadily and without interruption, as though nothing had happened. The peasants seem to be totally indifferent to the war. Their resistance to the germs of fear is better than that of the townspeople.

The food stores of Moscow have started strange sales. They put on the market totally new and unknown goods, mainly beverages. There are various Polish and Baltic gins and brandies, and a lot of Spanish wines. Huge queues appeared immediately in front of the shops selling

these rare delicacies. All those who had any time to spare queued gladly in the hope of getting a bottle of genuine Xeres, Malaga or Valdepeñas after only a few hours' waiting. The stock of wines had been probably acquired during the Spanish war, when Russia had to import something in exchange for the important commodities she supplied to Spain. The release of these precious liquors were enthusiastically welcomed by the public. The enthusiasm of the connoisseurs of wine cooled down when troops suddenly surrounded several of the longest queues and packed all the people in them into lorries, which promptly took them outside Moscow, to dig trenches.

This move was typical of the methods used by the government in stamping out ruthlessly any traces of panic. All the offices and institutions in Moscow, all the large tenement houses had to supply their quota of diggers for work on the fortifications outside the city. The universities and schools were not exempted. About 200,000 were drafted in that way to work as navvies, digging trenches. One of the persons caught in the draft was an acquaintance of mine, the wife of a university professor, employed in one of the large bookshops. Many of the people conscripted in this way are hardly suitable for hard manual work. In large numbers, however, they may be able to do something. The depleted staffs of the offices, on the other hand, will be too busy to have any time for thought about personal safety or comfort.

Still, the germs of panic are there. In the bread and tobacco queues one hears more and more complaints and grumbling against the authorities. There is a new crop of rumours about Hitler's victories, about parachutists and strange betrayals every day. But all these bacilli are

mercilessly destroyed by the powerful ruling machine, which absorbs and kills them like a vacuum cleaner sucking in dust or a disinfectant destroying germs. Still, nobody knows what might not happen without Stalin's continued presence at the Kremlin.

6. *We Left Moscow*

THERE was to be an evening reception at the Iranian embassy on October 16th, which is the national holiday of Iran, but the reception never took place and we celebrated the Persian day far beyond Moscow. About 11 A.M. all the legations were informed that they would have to leave Moscow in the evening of the same day. In the afternoon trains would be waiting at the Kazan station; the carriages were numbered and every legation was assigned its own accommodation. The departure was scheduled for 9 P.M. The destination was at first unknown, but late in the afternoon it transpired that we would be going to the former Samara on the Volga, now called Kuibyshev.

During an interval in the packing I still had time for a walk in town. A cold, raw blizzard was driving soft autumn snow across the streets. The Kremlin, the large buildings in Gorki street and the houses beyond the river Moskva were half visible through the blinding snow. The queues in front of the shops, in which little was left to buy, were longer than before. Many of my Russian friends were not at home, they had been sent to dig trenches outside the city. There were more soldiers and more military convoys in the streets. In the shops there seemed to be some febrile excitement, which appeared more dangerous than the former apathy of the long queues. Crowds of people

were camping around the Minsk station, the terminus for trains coming from the east. The other stations were also crowded. In the evening the streets were empty long before curfew time. They were silent, except for the harsh tread of sentries. Torches flashed from doorways as we went along the street. We were repeatedly asked for our papers which were examined even more thoroughly than usual.

The building of the Embassy, which we had occupied only a few minutes earlier, remained as empty as before, except for the few items of furniture which we had obtained from the Narkomindiel. Our staff had worked hard to get the Embassy clean and in good order after having found it ravaged by the German military mission. I have no doubt that our hall porters were more sorry to have to leave Moscow than anyone else was. The only booty we took from our German predecessors was writing paper, which they had left lying about in large quantities. It later proved to be a valuable find. When we reached the Kazan station it was past nine and completely dark. In front of the station there were many cars and soldiers in NKWD uniform; the foreign embassies and legations were arriving one after another. The big restaurant room of the Kazan station was dimly lit. The entire diplomatic corps accredited to the government of one of the greatest powers in the world, in one of its oldest capitals, was camping on its own suitcases under the heavily ornamented ceiling decorated in a kind of eastern baroque or "Old Russian" style. The dim light, the somewhat barbaric decoration of the hall and the huddled figures of the diplomats made a rather strange scene. Old diaries and memoirs, the portraits of Winterhalter and the annals

of Paris and Vienna tell a tale of diplomatic splendour. Brilliant minds—Talleyrands, Metternichs, Palmerstons; great writers—Chateaubriand, Melchior de Vogue, Prosper de Merimee, Claudel—added lustre to the diplomatic corps, while many great ladies adorned it with their beauty and the wit of their conversation. What is left of it all? I saw in the Kazan station of Moscow a collection of dignified, exquisite but superfluous antiques, swept aside by the main stream of life, like useless bric-a-brac. For many years diplomacy has proved powerless to prevent conflicts. For many years diplomats have been living, as I saw them in Moscow, on their packed suitcases, ready to evacuate at any moment—Warsaw, Oslo, Hague, Paris, Belgrade. They have grown used to the ineffectiveness of their persuasion against the more potent arguments of steel. I do not know what sort of international relations we may have after the war, but there seems to be no doubt that the great era of diplomacy is over—unless diplomacy discovers new methods or finds the means to recruit other personnel than that which has so far filled its ranks.

It was a small tower of Babel, or rather a League of Nations lobby transferred to a station waiting room. The tall, lean, distinguished figure could only be a Sir, and His Britannic Majesty's Ambassador—though it was more difficult to discern in him the representative of the left. The wise, wrinkled face of the Chinese Ambassador, who sat with half closed eyes, imperturbably patient, might have belonged to the envoy of the Son of Heaven to the court of one of the last monarchs of the House of Rurik, four or five centuries ago, as well as to the man sent by Chiang Kai-shek to Stalin. The pale eyed old gentleman could only be the representative of Sweden.

The Norwegian was not as easily identifiable, perhaps because he had a Polish mother. The beautiful woman with a delicate, intelligent profile was obviously French, even though she happened to be the wife of the Czech minister. The envoy of Iran might have been that of Afghanistan and vice versa, but it did not seem to matter much. The representatives of the Republic of Tanu-Tuwa were huddled gloomily in a corner. They might as well have taken their place among the delegates from the Asiatic Soviet Republics in the Kremlin parliament. My Ambassador's head was that of a scholar, the type familiar to Oxford as well as Halle, Sorbonne or old Cracow. They represented together most of the countries of the world; practically all were sent by governments in exile; none of them knew where they might still have to represent their respective nations. Together with the diplomatic group were the foreign correspondents. The familiar faces of the Narkomindiel officials charged with their care were also to be seen in the crowd.

About midnight we passed at last through two large halls crammed with people, going between two rows of soldiers with bayonets on their rifles. The platforms were completely blacked out, but we eventually found our train and our compartments. The heads of missions were given separate compartments and we others had to manage as we best could. After another hour of waiting the train moved. There was no last glance at Moscow because of the utter darkness.

There were rumours about the German tanks having broken through at two points, about imminent danger and even about unrest in Moscow. We knew that President Kalinin was leaving with us, although Stalin remained at

the Kremlin. It meant that Moscow was to be defended. We also knew that all trains were likely to be attacked by German bombers.

On the following day, however, there was a "purga" which means an icy blizzard of dry snow. The wind had overturned the small wooden fences supposed to protect the railway track against blowing snow. We slowly sank into the dreamy stupor characteristic of Russian railway journeys, on which no one knows when or whether the train will reach its destination, no one knows what the next station will be and what food, if any, will be found there. Journeys across Russia have always been largely tours in the unknown. The present war heightened the sense of uncertainty and isolation which is so typical of Russian rail travel. The diplomatic train was one huge picnic and barter flourished, providing post-war Europe with a splendid example of the advantages of free trade. The Poles were well provided with caviar and they had, of course, the best vodka on the train; the Czechs, as always, had absolutely everything and did not have to buy anything; the representatives of Tanu-Tuwa chewed sunflower and pumpkin seed, which seemed to make them perfectly happy and oblivious of the outside world; the British could get anything in exchange for whisky and Players; the Americans could give away most things, because they had far more than they needed and the journalists accepted gifts from all, like sensible fellows.

The train hardly ever stopped, but it was slow. We did not have the slightest notion of our whereabouts. The passage to the cars of the Narkomindiel was blocked like a real Russian frontier and this did not help international relations within the train. We could listen to wireless,

mostly German broadcasts, throbbing with martial music and arrogant self-confidence. By the end of the day—and winter days in Russia are soon over—the passion for information and purchases gradually subsided. All the nations came to the unanimous conclusion that world events could very well continue without the intervention of those fifty or sixty people travelling across snowed-up Russian steppes to an unknown provincial town on the Volga. Only the Ambassadors and ministers kept the dignity of their rank and paid each other visits just as they would have done in Paris or in London. The rest of the personnel found more profitable occupations; bridge and poker came into their own, as in the good pre-war days, to the disgust of the Russians who seem to observe a kind of puritanism in this particular respect.

The second day was, if possible, more monotonous than the first, for we had penetrated a few hundred miles deeper into Asia. The landscape and the climate become Asiatic long before we reached the powerful wall of the Urals. We stopped more frequently than before. One of the stations—was it Riazan?—had been thoroughly bombed. We saw everywhere masses of refugees camping in the open. Some of them were Russians who had been settled in the Baltic countries by the Soviet government during its brief occupation of those regions. Now they had to return to their native land, driven back by German tanks. They seemed to be badly fed, but the sanitary service was quite good. Every station, crawling with masses of people, waiting for God knows what, living on nothing and frantically struggling to keep their square foot of bare floor, reminded me of Somerset Maugham's description of Russia during the last war. It was a mass evacua-

tion, not a new thing in that country, where millions are moved at a whim of the government, but larger in scale than any of the former deportations. The crowds tramping along the dusty roads of Poland, or the straight *routes nationales* of France were small compared to that gigantic mass of grey, shapeless humanity, slowly creeping eastwards, aimless and resigned.

At one of the stations, where we tried to get other than tinned food, I met Ehrenburg. The great writer was tired, unshaven and depressed. In the crowd he had lost an attaché case containing a shaving outfit and the manuscript of the third part of "The Fall of Paris." Fortunately I had a spare Gillette, which I offered to the distressed Russian writer. I would have found it more difficult to replace the lost manuscript.

Ehrenburg was a pessimist. I tried to argue that the Russian winter would hold the Germans. He interrupted me, annoyed;

"Foreigners always talk about the Russian winter. You must realise that the Soviet soldiers feel the cold, too. The Germans are not the only people to be sensitive to frost. Our men are more resistant to cold, but fifty degrees below freezing point is too much for them too. The Germans will have good quarters in the towns they have taken and what about our troops? They will have to camp in the open."

The notices at the stations had become bilingual. We were passing through the "autonomous republics" Mordwa and Maryjska, inhabited by a Tartar population. They are an outpost of the Asiatic south, coming fairly near to Moscow.

The third day was almost indistinguishable from the

first two. At some stations we got hot meals. Besides, we had become used to the Russian tea, continuously brewed and drunk at all times, to wash down various snacks.

The snow in the fields was deeper than before and under the snow—in the end of October—there was corn in stacks. It had not yet been brought in. The grain was freezing and rotting. After the loss of the Ukraine, the main granary of the Union, this promised famine in the coming year. Why had the harvest not been completed? The call-up of the men for the army was responsible to some extent, but in the autumn the mobilisation was not yet complete. Besides, the Russian women, probably better workers than the men, could have done what the land girls are doing in Britain. But mechanisation and collectivisation reduced the number of horses in Russia; the tractors dislocated the horses. The wartime shortage of liquid fuel made it impossible for the motorised agriculture to carry on its normal work.

In the evening of the third day our train stopped at a station, alongside three other trains. They were all composed of closed goods carriages, with primitive iron stoves in the middle—the famous “*tiepluszka*” (hot-houses)—well known from the last war. They were guarded by a NKWD escort. The trains were full of women, old men and children—hardly any younger men—with rather more European features than those of the Russians in the provinces which we were crossing.

The newspapermen soon discovered the reason.

“It’s one of the autonomous republics migrating to a new place of settlement.”

I can well imagine the headlines which such an event would inspire in any other country at any other time;

"Republic moves by rail; 600,000 people change their address after 200 years of residence; Republic on wheels" or "A nation takes a trip." In Russia it was almost a commonplace occurrence. It was the autonomous republic of the Volga Germans being deported to some unknown lands beyond the Urals. On the following days we saw many such trains going in the same direction.

The republic of the Volga Germans has a very interesting history. They had been settled on the Volga by the Tsars—mostly by Catherine the Great—who imported German farmers just as they imported German princesses for wives, officers for the guards and craftsmen for industry. The vast lands along the Volga were nearly deserted after their recent liberation from Tartar rule; they had to be colonised. The Germans established themselves there for good. They were occasionally persecuted, when the ardour of the Russian orthodox church reached a particularly high pitch, or when there was some anti-German feeling in the country. Generally speaking, however, they did well. They were excellent farmers and they became one of the few prosperous communities in Russia, together with the rich Cossacks of Kuban and the peasants of the Ukraine and Siberia.

At the time of the revolution they seemed unexpectedly accommodating and they accepted the Bolshevik reforms with good grace, although they probably had their own private views about them, being an old bourgeois community. They realised, however, that as a small minority in the huge Russian ocean, they had to follow its ebb and tide, as they had done with some success for centuries. They also knew that Russia had lost in the revolution a large proportion of its educated class and that it could

not create one at short notice. They decided to fill the gap left by the old Russian intelligentsia. Many of them reached important positions in the Soviet administration, like the Jews, Latvians, Georgians and to some extent the Poles, all belonging to those national groups of the Russian Empire which had the oldest cultural tradition and intellectual background. In the Russian industry and in the Moscow offices there were plenty of Germans from the Volga republic. In Tsarist times many German villages on the "mother of Russian rivers" were called after Catherine or Peter the Great, as a discreet reminder of the debt owed by Russia to Germany and of the ties of blood and culture. In modern times the versatile Volga Germans founded many Marxstadts and Engelstadts, tactfully recalling the fact that communism was a genuine German product, exported to Russia together with other benefits of civilisation. I have heard stories about the "cunning Germans," who frequently elected their ministers or priests—some were Protestants and some Catholics—to be the presidents of kolkhozes or local soviets. Like many Caucasian peoples, they tried to preserve their national character under the cover of communist institutions.

In 1930 and 1932 some thousands of Volga Germans decided that the Russian climate did not suit their constitutions and they emigrated, partly to Germany and partly, I believe, to Bolivia. The majority stayed on. Their number was estimated at 600,000 at least. Now, during their forced evacuation, it was put at 400,000—an example of the relativity of statistical science. At any rate we witnessed the liquidation of the two-hundred-years-old German colony on the Volga. The Germans were deported to an unknown destination, but they were

allowed to take with them some of their possessions. The behaviour of German minorities in the other European countries seems to have justified such a radical measure of precaution. Hitler would have probably transferred them from the Volga too, as he did with the Germans from Rumania and Latvia, only westward instead of eastward, giving them the land of the Poles or Czechs instead of the no-man's land of Siberia. The modern tendency is to have clear-cut national frontiers, without any islands or enclaves.

Syzran seemed to be a frontier town. A gloomy, flat town of the Tsarist era, enriched though hardly embellished by the Revolution, which gave it half a dozen big armament factories. We crossed one of the few bridges over the Volga. We saw the great river for the first time in the evening, bordered with vast willow jungles, sprawling amidst creeks and backwaters. The huge railway bridge, closely guarded, was like a narrow, puny pathway thrown across the huge river and dwarfed by nature. The grey stream carried the first chunks of ice and snow. The landscape was more monotonous and desolate than ever, but not without a sombre grandeur. It was a river well matched to its country.

On the following morning, on the fifth day of our journey, we arrived in Kuibyshev, to see a sunny sky and dry earth, without a trace of snow. Three trains full of diplomats and Narkomindiel officials, with the green saloon car of President Kalinin, were already at the station. The local population seemed to be greatly surprised by our arrival. Every legation was informed about its new address; in the Kuibyshev, Frunze, Chapayev streets. It was

warm and the news from the front was somewhat more reassuring than at the time of our departure from Moscow.

We felt that we had arrived to Kuibyshev with happy omens and spirits were higher than they had been for weeks.

7. *The City of Kuibyshev*

OUR first steps, as we left the station, were made in mud. It is sometimes thin and sometimes thick, it varies in depth and consistence, but it is always there. It is the most permanent feature of the Kuibyshev landscape, which is infinitely monotonous. The low autumn clouds fill the sky; the steppe is flat and endless; the vast muddy river carries in its sluggish stream occasional lumps of ice. The town itself is as dull as the surrounding nature. All the streets are parallel and cross each other at right angles. It is a huge chessboard. The plan of the city resembles Manhattan, except that in Manhattan space was limited and the buildings had to rise to the sky, making canyons of the streets. In Kuibyshev there was land to spare and the streets are very wide, even to excess, like the broad tracts crossing the steppes. Most of the streets have no surfacing at all, or only the remains of old cobbles. They look rather like tracks in the wild. Only a few streets in the centre of the town have asphalt surfaces—gift of the Revolution. Only these central streets have houses with more than one storey, sad, ugly provincial houses. The rest of the town is filled with one-floor wooden houses. Almost everything seems to be built of wood. The local architecture is peculiar, every part of a house is adorned with strange wood carvings of exotic design. They are

quite attractive and utterly unlike anything seen in Europe, probably an influence of the exuberant decorative art of Asia.

The Catholic church had been turned into a museum, the Lutheran church into a warehouse and the Russian orthodox churches fared no better. It is obvious that there must have been foreign settlements in the town. The disappearance of the churches was no great loss from the artistic point of view, for they had nothing of the wealth and beauty of the churches in the old towns of Russia. Kuibyshev, the former Samara, was a town which emerged late and grew quickly as a commercial centre on the Volga. The north sent timber down the stream, the south sent up salt, and the middle Volga regions shipped grain to both north and south. The Russians have always possessed keen business acumen. In the XIXth century this town was built by a class of enterprising, ruthless and greedy merchants. Fantastic tales were told about the great fairs held there and about the wild orgies with which they were said to terminate.

The city of wooden houses was enriched by the residences of local millionaires who made their fortunes in wheat, in timber, in leather. The houses of these commercial nabobs are still there. They are the most outrageous products of the last century's passion for elaborate decoration. They groan under the weight of cornices, pillars, balconies and other stucco embellishments. There was a time when all this was the height of fashion. Now it is not yet a venerable antiquity, though already hopelessly outdated. In a street of such houses one looks for a 1907 model car. It is said in Kuibyshev that the owner of one of the villas, now the Afghanistan legation, had been the

first man in Russia to run a motor car. This may or not be true, but it denotes the atmosphere of the new, go-ahead Russian town of the 'nineties.

Nothing is left of that period and its spirit. The houses are like empty shells washed up on a beach, without the molluscs which had built them for their homes. The storm of revolution swept away a whole world. It destroyed even its name, for Samara, the citadel of Russian business, took on the name of Kuibyshev who had started a workmen's revolt there. He helped in the Five Year Plan and died—apparently poisoned by Trotzkyists—to become one of the saints of the Soviet calendar.

In the large rectangular square in front of the imposing Palace of Culture, there is a bronze statue of Kuibyshev—short, sturdy, collected. He looks over a wide horizon of forests across the Volga. He is the typical figure of a Party leader. Below, in a smaller square, facing the town and the statue of Kuibyshev, there is another group in bronze. It is Chapayev, the hero of Red guerillas, leading his men, on horseback. The dynamism and expression of that monument is very Russian. The two men in bronze keep watch over the city.

One would look there in vain for traces of the past, however recent. Almost one third of the population of Kuibyshev left the town a short while ago. About a hundred thousand people were moved out to make room for evacuees from Moscow, like ourselves, or from other towns of Western Russia. The same thing happened in Gorki, in Kazan, in Swierdlovsk, in Saratov, where the governments and authorities of the western republics of the Union sought shelter. The Soviet policy was to evacuate everything, even agricultural labour. Such a policy, even

if it was not fully carried into effect, was bound to increase the density of population in the remaining part of the country. The former inhabitants of Kuibyshev are now probably in Alma Ata or Novosibirsk, unless they were sent to the smaller towns of Soviet Asia or to kolkhozes. The town bears the mark of its nomadic history; Catholic or Protestant churches with no one to worship in them, palaces from which the owners have gone for ever and houses in which other people had been living only a few months ago inhabited by newcomers.

A city like Kuibyshev is interesting to anyone who wants to have a true picture of Russia. There are in Russia many towns completely changed by the Revolution, like Kharkov. They do not present an accurate picture of the changes, but incline to exaggeration. It would also be a mistake to judge the Revolution by those towns and districts where it has done little or nothing. Kuibyshev provides a very good example of the changes wrought by the Revolution in an average Russian town.

The observer may be discouraged at first by the mud, the dilapidated houses and the hopeless monotony of everything in Kuibyshev. He may notice the streets without any surfacing and the broken pavements. He may see the few miserable shops in which there is practically nothing to buy and the larger marts in the centre of the town in which little can be obtained except sunflower seed (which is chewed by the people like gum), onions, milk and eggs. He may look at the squalid living quarters of the population, with half a dozen persons to a room, and the tattered clothes of the crowd. But every trip outside Kuibyshev provides an opportunity of seeing the large factories on its outskirts, some of them under construction, and the

powerful anti-aircraft batteries guarding the town. A huge prison camp, Samlag, is building a vast aerodrome and some big settlement which has not yet received a name. At the other end of the town there is another military aerodrome. In the forests, beyond the bend of the Volga, there are other factories concealed in deep ravines and gullies. That is where aircraft components and aero engines are made. Sometimes bands of airmen come from these settlements to town for a few hours and fill the streets with their laughter. Women carrying water in buckets from the nearest well, people waiting in bread queues, people reading the news bulletins posted on walls because of the shortage of paper, all look at the airmen with sympathy and admiration. They are the new men. The factories in which they work and test new aeroplanes are also new. They are the fruit of many years of tremendous sacrifices.

It is true that boredom is as deep in Kuibyshev as the mud itself, as ubiquitous as the snow in the winter and the thick white dust in the summer. It is true that the houses are old-fashioned, that there are too few of them and that they are very squalid and poor. But in the steppes around the city there are factories, aerodromes and a new kind of life. An industrial one. A gigantic mass of human energy has been directed towards the construction of those new things. Kuibyshev is like a very old garment, frayed and falling to pieces. But something new is being built, at the cost of many years of terrible hardship of the whole population. Still, the structure is only beginning to take shape.

The great migration of nations is not yet over. A few days after our arrival in Kuibyshev I saw at the station two trains, side by side. One contained the Poles recently

released from prisons and labour camps as a result of the Polish-Russian pact. There were women, old men, children—some of them born in exile—all on their way south, to new temporary headquarters. The other train was headed in the opposite direction, probably bound for the same prison regions which the more fortunate of the Poles had just left. It was full of German prisoners coming from the front. They naturally looked miserable, dirty and unshaven. Their uniforms were obviously unsuited to the Russian climate. They probably never expected to make the acquaintance of Russia in that way, though they had dreamed for years about its vast open spaces. Still less did they expect to meet on their way Poles returning to their homes, still far from their destination, but on their way back.

In the morning, heavily laden camels come from the steppes to the market places of Kuibyshev. As the snow has already covered the countryside, their appearance seems rather incongruous. The population, however, is well used to them although old inhabitants of Kuibyshev look at them with contempt.

"See, the camels came with the Revolution, too. Before we never had any camels in Samara. There used to be camels in Asia, in Tashkent, of course. But Samara was a real European city, with tramways, but certainly no dromedaries!"

And they add with a cunning twinkle in their eyes: Oh, the camel is a rare beast. He hardly ever eats and drinks—once in a fortnight. He does not require anything at all. Now you understand why there are so few horses and so many camels in the kolkhozes. The horse is a counter-revolutionary animal. He dares to ask for oats. Not so the camel. He needs nothing and asks for nothing.

8. In the Steppes of the Heart of Russia

DUSK falls here early, at six o'clock, and the night is immediately very dark and windy. The wind is cold and brings snow after a fine day, or rain after a clouded sky. At night the solitude and utter isolation of the village on the bleak desert steppe become physical sensations. The nearest railway station is scores of miles away and the trains are incredibly slow. The nearest "track" is also very far away—it is a broad track, without a hard surface, rather like the caravan routes trodden by camels in deserts smaller than that of Russia. Before dark a few neighbours came to the house in which the four of us are staying. They are mostly women. The men are serving, or else they felt it would be safer to stay at home; allies may be allies, but little good can come of meeting foreigners. One never knows.

The women seem to be bolder, or perhaps more inquisitive. I already know their names—rather the names of their fathers and their husbands. I see them walking gingerly, sometimes clinging to the wooden enclosures in front of the houses, for the mud in the wide road passing through the village is truly Russian, treacly and knee deep. They come in just as we are lighting at the big stove the tarred torches which serve as lamps (there is some paraffin, but it has to be spared). For many centuries

Russian peasants had been using such torches during the long winter evenings. In the corner of the room there is an icon—I saw icons in practically every cottage. Usually the wife says it belongs to her and the husband produces the same excuse if he is asked any awkward questions. More religion is tolerated among the women than among the men. When the women come in, I feel that they are tempted to greet us, as they have always done, with the name of Christ. They never dared to do it. But as there is no new greeting, they stand about, rather embarrassed. Then they sit down around the huge stove, which can be used for baking bread, to sleep on and for many other purposes. It has remained the most important part of the Russian peasant's living room. Now there are on the walls portraits of Stalin, Voroshilov, Marx and Engels. Asked about Stalin, the housewife was very eloquent; she called Voroshilov "our hawk," the traditional term of an old legend applied to a Soviet marshal. So were called in the folk ballads Stienka Razin, the Volga pirate, Pugachev, chief of a popular rebellion, Dymitr Donski, conqueror of the Tartars and many other brigands, leaders and soldiers whose adventurous deeds stirred the sentiment and imagination of the people. So will be called the future heroes of Russia, as long as there is a Russia.

But the knowledge of the good housewife soon ran dry. She was cautious on the subject of Marx, to avoid a blunder. "He was very wise. . . . He wrote books. . . . He has done it all. . . ." As to Engels, he was a total mystery. She knew only that his first name was Frederick. A Christian name is not difficult to memorize. She knew that he had been a relative of *the other one*, that he also wrote books and also was very wise. Voroshilov appeals to

the imagination of the people, but the two aliens slip by unobserved. Stalin and Voroshilov are to be found in almost every house, but Marx is often replaced by Lenin, Engels by Budienny or Timoshenko, or even one of the minor deities of the Red Olympus. The change seems significant enough. I saw it in many Soviet villages. And the peasant woman in the house in which we stayed was young. She was under thirty.

The evening parties are invariably attended by the local Party dignitary, whose duty it is to guard the political orthodoxy of the kolkhoz and its inhabitants (he is probably afraid that we might be spreading foreign propaganda). I know that he had looked with uneasiness at the Polish platoon which came from the camp of Tockoie, where two Polish divisions are now being formed. He knew that in the fields of the kolkhoz there were rotting potatoes which nobody brought in, for many men had been called up and the others were too lazy to work. They dug up just as much as they needed for themselves and damned the rest.

He knew, from the experience of the other kolkhozes, that the Poles would dig out all the potatoes, even the half frozen and rotted ones. They would take some of them to their camp, where food is very, very short. But they would leave the rest for the kolkhoz. These Polish soldiers, who had just left the "lagers" of which people speak only in whispers, may be useful, but they are alarming. The sleepy kolkhoz lost in the steppes beyond the Volga was swept, before the snowstorms of the early winter, by something that seemed to the guardian of official morals to be an ill wind. But the guardian himself was not in the best of health. He complained almost continuously, though the

village women said that he used to be perfectly fit until the war and the call-up. Still, perhaps he was not quite well, for he dozed off very easily. He yawned and fell asleep during a conversation, or he would go out, probably to bed. His departure enlivened the conversation, just as a handful of matchwood thrown into the fire makes it blaze with a brighter flame.

I have known many villages in Russia at various times, but I saw one like this for the first time when I went from Kuibyshev to visit the Polish troops and joined a platoon going to late work in the fields. I am glad to see it, because I know that it is typical of the majority of villages in the vast country. It is quite unlike the villages of White Ruthenia or Ukraine. It is like a Negro village in having no history. The past is simply not there. There are in the west of Europe villages with a history of a thousand years or more; there are in Poland villages that have seen many centuries; in Ukraine and Russia there are some that remember the XVIIIth century, but the great majority of Russian villages know nothing of their past, even when it is fairly recent. These villages in the steppes appeared late, like the town of Samara—now Kuibyshev—or the port of Odessa and many other towns. The time of the Tsars is a dim and distant past. There is a vague memory of imperial tax collectors, but their visits were infrequent and the taxes were low. There were portraits of the Tsar, surrounded by white-clad daughters, and young men used to be called up for military service to return after a few years with disquieting tales of distant parts. Nobody remembers the times of peasant servitude, for these are lands put under the plough less than half a century ago. There were no mansions to be plundered, no English

parks to be cut down and no squires to be executed. As in native villages history begins with the arrival of the Whites, so in these Russian villages of the east—perhaps 70% of all the rural area of the country—history begins with the arrival of the Reds. The first world war; the Revolution: the civil war—these are the earliest historical events known to the people of these remote and vast provinces.

Young girls and young women ask about the present world, about England, America, Japan. All the other countries belong to a strange nebulous outside world of which literally nothing is known. Even the names France, Spain or Poland are almost unknown. But the older women remember something of the brief history of their village and province. They tell stories well known to everyone, just in my honour, to reward me for the replies which I had given to their questions. All the others have heard these stories a hundred times, but they still seem to enjoy them, like children eager to listen again to the familiar words of a favourite tale.

“After the Bolshevik war (that is the civil war),” says a middle-aged woman whose appearance might be improved by the addition of half a dozen front teeth, “after the Bolshevik war and even while it was still on, only women were left here. Quite alone. . . .”

“Just like now,” one of the younger women sniffed mournfully. “Now we have plenty of men, and the Poles are here, too. But then there was nobody to do the work. How can a woman live alone? Plough and harvest and bring the crops in and work about the house. . . .”

The woman broke off, to hear the understanding approval of the others.

"And then," she went on, "we also had visitors, but not like you, coming only for a few days, to dig potatoes. Men used to come from Moscow, from Tula, from Orel and Woronez! The civil war was there and their land is poor—nothing to our Volga soil." The lordly pride of people from fertile plains rang in her voice.

All present nodded in agreement. The woman was a splendid narrator. She was supposed to be telling the story to the visitors, really only to me, for I was the only one to ask questions about the nameless hamlet in the Volga steppes. But her neighbours listened to the old story with interest.

The woman stopped for breath, or perhaps to refresh her memory and went on: "They were real men, faithful orthodox we used to call them in the old times. Big like a stove. With hands like that." An eloquent gesture made her meaning clear, though it was dark in the room. "A beard like a broom. A voice like a priest's. Tfu," she corrected, "like a priest's when he sings in church the 'molebni.' Hard working, steady, strong. Just look at him—a bull."

There was a sentimental sigh somewhere in the corner.

"Eh! which one is missing her man so much? The war has been on for only half a year and you want it so badly already?" the older woman teased.

Giggling broke out and distracted the listeners. I was the only one to listen to the rest of the tale. A man would come into the house and stay. . . . He tilled the fields and did everything. . . . The woman cooked his food. . . . He was the husband. . . .

"And what happened when the husband came back?" I asked.

"If there were children, he turned back. If there were no children, he turned the other man out. But husbands seldom returned. Some were killed in battle, others lost as prisoners and others hung by the Bolsheviks or the Whites. And some perhaps found other women and stayed with them. Our Russian land is big and it is not hard to find a woman and a house."

There was a fresh animation in her voice. "Only the men from Tambov were insincere. They would plough, sow and harvest. Then at night they would load on a cart all the best they could lay their hands on and take it to their Tambov province. They even took pigs. . . . Probably for the wives they kept there," she added bitterly. "Later our women grew cautious. They would not take on men from Tambov. . . ."

Then she returned to the present day: "Well, now you have men from far away, from Poland. Which one will you choose, eh? Mind they don't treat you the Tambov way. . . ." And she chuckled with the evil leer of an old woman, a woman who knows much, a woman whom no one would approach as they did before.

The other, younger women, shuddered at the sight of the hag. The lieutenant commanding the platoon, a young lawyer from Vilno, smiled quietly. He knew, as well as the women, that his soldiers had already met with warm hospitality.

The tarred torches flickered unsteadily, like the conversation, which touched many points; about the tall houses in America and was it true that a pair of stockings was given to every member of the audience in American cinemas; was it true that the Germans had invisible aeroplanes and did I see the King of England and "how do

people like us live over there." Distant towns and worlds come into focus in such a conversation like things seen through a telescope when we turn the knob and find our range. What eager curiosity I found on such dark nights in a lost Soviet village of the steppes! The press rarely reaches it. When it does, it brings heroic front communiqués, orders from Moscow, Party appeals and little else. The loudspeakers, set by the radio headquarters of the district, pour out streams of propaganda, a mixture of statistics and appeals, music and instructions. A live man, who sits there and talks, a real person who has seen all those places and comes here, a man who came by aeroplane from Kuibyshev—which is already in the great, distant world—and then from Buzuluk, which is also very far away, that is something quite different. The people of the steppe village need a very direct approach to stir their imagination. They want to see the speaker. I know that in every house in which there are Poles similar conversations are now going on. Questions are asked and answered.

Our old woman carried on her tale. "They told me that the Poles had arrived. I did not believe them—where should they have come from? Why in Buzuluk? Poles? During the last war we had Austrians here. They were prisoners. They used to make nice rings of some fine metal. And now they tell me the Poles are here, soldiers, friendly with our people and they have crosses. Then (she mentioned a name) went out to see; she was always curious. She came back and told us all. It was true. She showed us a cross. A lovely tin cross to carry on your chest. The soldiers gave it to her."

In the dim room, with the photographs of the Party

leaders, bearded Marx and pensive Engels plunged in darkness, I noticed again the lieutenant's discreet smile. The room listened in silence. I did not smile at all, though I knew why the lieutenant did. Every Polish soldier who left the Soviet prison wore a cross. Many did not carry one when they entered it. Some had not worn them for a long time. Besides, all crosses and other "objects of devotion" were taken away on admission. They were prohibited. But the crosses appeared again. Men made them with prison bread, with wire or with a piece of bone that might be in the soup. I saw crosses made of fish bone, of cardboard and glue, of string and thread, even some made from buttons and from badges of rank torn off the uniforms. All possible and impossible materials were used. The Austrian prisoners of the last war are still remembered by the rings they used to make. The Poles will be remembered in Russia by their crosses.

"Tell me," said the woman, "do people in Poland, in the West (the world seen from some Ivanovka or Pietrovka is uniform and simple) do they really believe in God? Do they have churches and priests and services and all? And they are civilised, educated people, aren't they? They believe in God. Is there a God?"

These were risky questions. They might well be classified here as counter-revolutionary propaganda, and the simplest answer would be even more dangerous. I did not want to do anything that might have an unfavourable influence, however slight, on the good relations between my country and Russia. I therefore replied vaguely and generally, stressing the achievements of Russia in the last twenty years. A score of eyes gleamed in the semi-darkness

and then the questions came again, always the same. How do people live in the West? How are things there?

One of our group was more willing to reply and he spoke more fluent Russian than myself, so I preferred merely to listen quietly to the questions. The room was getting darker, for there is a shortage of wood for torches. People were only shadows. They looked like the hieratic, lifeless saints of the icons of Byzantium. And yet it seemed to me that the village was genuinely loyal to the Soviet regime. It seemed that collectivisation had been accepted without much opposition. I racked my memory. Yes, there was not much struggle in Russia proper. There was violent, desperate resistance in the Ukraine, in White Ruthenia, in the Caucasus and on the Don, where there were prosperous Cossack farmers. The vast plains of Russia itself did not provide much news at that time. They are more isolated and things which happen there can be more easily concealed from the world, it is true, but I think that there was really little opposition in that part of the country, where there was much less attachment to the soil, to a certain definite piece of land. The individual gardens at the back of the houses are here neglected and full of weeds, while similar gardens in the Ukraine, near Kiev or Berdichev, are carefully kept. One can always tell, by looking round the countryside, whether the inhabitants have a feeling for their land, whether they have lost it or never had it at all. Many districts of southern France testify to a strong urge to emigrate to towns and indifference to land; the thousands of small gardens in Germany prove that in spite of industrial development people still love their soil. In these distant parts of Russia

cultivation is recent; before it came there was only the wild, boundless steppe, then a form of traditional collective farming known as "mir." There was nothing to destroy and little to reform. To build a factory in the middle of London, one would have to expropriate many people and pull down many houses; but to erect the same factory in the Scottish Highlands one would not have to destroy anything—except their beauty. Religion seems to have been the only thing in that part of the country to have been cut down by the keen scythe of communism in its sweep across a continent. The peasants want prosperity. They vaguely realise that they do not have it. They feel, even more vaguely, that some other countries, without more natural wealth, are far more prosperous. They do not deny that communism brought progress, for communism meant for that part of the world the tractor, wireless, and travelling cinema, sometimes even electric lighting. They do not believe that prosperity can be achieved only by discarding communism. But the deep undercurrent of religious feeling is the strongest element of unrest in that remote village lost in the huge steppes of Russia.

I know why the lieutenant had smiled when someone said that all the Polish soldiers wore crosses. One of our generals once described his division, still waiting for weapons, as the largest trust for the production of devotional objects in the U.S.S.R. In one of the other houses in the same village there was even a larger party than ours. A Polish sergeant, Sojka, a locksmith by trade, a Lwow man, derived tangible benefits from the religious feelings of the population. He had asked me for the empty tins; I had taken some tinned food from Kuibyshev, as it

is almost impossible to get anything on the way. Sojka, like many other Polish soldiers, was manufacturing crosses. It struck me as rather odd that the local people, since they wanted crosses, did not make any themselves. After all there are still many priests, deacons or nuns hiding in the villages, celebrating in secrecy marriage and other sacraments. They get paid for their clandestine services and they live quite comfortably, by Russian standards. Of course, some of them are caught and then they are not so comfortable. I even heard about false priests, who carry on the same religious practices, although they have never been consecrated. But it apparently did not occur to them to make crosses. When the Russian people began to buy crosses from the Poles—in towns, markets and kolkhozes—the Polish soldiers began to make them in quantities. For a cross they could get even the most valuable commodities of all, tobacco and vodka.

Sojka is an expert. He discusses the respective merits of tins used for Soviet fish from Kamchatka, for American corned beef and Nestle condensed milk. The latter were apparently the best. In the evening, he makes crosses in his billet. People wait for them with infinite patience and with even greater eagerness than for the news we bring them from the world outside the U.S.S.R. Sojka started making crosses in prison from genuine piety, then he made them for friends who did not have his skill. Now he makes them for a living. He even makes—to the indignation of some of his comrades—crosses of the orthodox pattern. I admired not only the generous tolerance of the Roman Catholic for the Eastern Church, but his commercial ability. I believe that orthodox crosses fetched

much higher prices in tobacco and vodka—the accepted currencies of the Soviet village—than ordinary Catholic crosses. The extra work put in by the Polish locksmith of Lwow was well worth the trouble.

The night was dark over the Volga steppes. A heavy wind brought in turns snow and rain, flooding huge fields and wasting the crops. The roads were also flooded and would be impassable until the first frost, and so was the village-kolkhoz without a history and without a past, which could remember of the times before the Revolution only one thing, that there had once been God. The churches and priests may have disappeared, but religion did not. There may even be distrust towards the church and clergy, but the religious feeling is as strong as ever. It may find expression in dark superstition, in barbarous practices and beliefs which could not survive contact with civilisation, but it is still there. That is perhaps why the Polish soldiers, who wear and make crosses, met with so much quiet sympathy in the Russian villages.

9. Which of the Three Horses?

ON my return to Kuibyshev I tasted the delights of a thorough "sanobrabotka." It is one of the new words with which the Soviet authorities enriched the language, while the war contributed to the universal spread of the word as well as the thing itself. It means simply personal disinfection. The extremely low standard of living, general fifth and squalor, as well as the high war migrations of hundreds of thousands of people cannot fail to promote the spread of infectious disease. After all the Soviet Union includes some Asiatic lands familiar with leprosy, cholera and plague. Compared to these scourges of humanity, ordinary typhus and dysentery seem mild, but they are dangerous, too. The Soviet authorities introduced regular and frequent disinfection in an attempt to cope with epidemics. Children, workmen, soldiers and travellers have to submit to the routine procedure. On buying a railway ticket and on arrival in any locality one has to produce a certificate of *sanobrabotka*. It is as indispensable as the passport. No wonder that the "sanobrabotka" certificates are often forged and there is a brisk demand for the false documents, for the population—with typical eastern fatalism—still dislikes disinfectants, perhaps anxious not to damage clothes, which are expensive and difficult to obtain.

The *sanobrabotka* process is hard on the clothes. It soaked mine in various chemical fumes which are certain to destroy all the carriers of typhus that I may have picked up during my three weeks' journey from one camp to another. As to myself, I was sent to a bath-house, a real Russian bath, one of the oldest institutions in that country, older than the Kremlin, than baptism, than everything else. The Kuibyshev bathing establishment is modernised and improved. There are separate cubicles as well as common rooms and basins, there are various charges for different services, there are private baths. A notice to the effect that such private baths cannot be engaged by two citizens of opposite sex proves that the practice was discontinued quite recently. The date of the decree, 1937, suggests that until that time such mixed private bathing was quite legal and usual.

I preferred, however, the common room. It is a large, dimly lit hall, with a concrete pool in the middle. Clouds of steam rise as boiling water is poured on the floor. Naked bodies gleam through the steam, some reclining, others standing on unsteady feet or trying to wash. Steam takes out of the body all its sweat, its dirt and germs, but it also drains strength. My chance companions look emaciated and tortured. They could pose for an illustration to Dante. Sometimes the thick mist discloses the body of a Hellenic ephebe or the torso of a Roman gladiator, but they are not many. I left the bath before the others. Their hearts are used to long periods of heat and they can stand several hours of steam.

The Russian bath, known as "bania" has always been immensely popular in that country. There used to be villages without a church, but there were none without

its *bania*, even if it was simply a wooden hut in which hot water was poured on stones. The peasants would spend many luxuriant hours of blessed nakedness in the *bania*. The Russian bath was the sanitary precursor of the *sanobrabotka*, of which it is now an integral part. It was also a very early form of collectivism. The *bania* was equally popular among the boyars and among the peasants. It was a meeting place and a social institution, where people talked and exchanged ideas. It also served the purposes hinted at by the Soviet decree of 1937. People going to the *bania* receive the traditional friendly wish "Zlekhoj paroj,"—May the steam be light—that is, warm but not oppressively suffocating. The *bania* was not a purely Russian institution, but one common to all Slav nations. Similar bath-houses existed in all the countries where the Slav language was spoken. They were well known to Poles, Czechs, Serbs and to those Elbe Slavs who were totally exterminated by the Germans. But Catholicism was opposed to the *bania* on moral grounds, while the Eastern Church tolerated it. The struggle for the *bania* lasted several centuries. Polish and Czech chronicles report in detail the violent controversies on the subject of mixed baths. The Roman Church finally won the battle and the *bania* survived only in the countries which Catholicism did not reach. Even in the Ukraine it gradually disappeared. The Great Russians may be justly proud of having preserved an old Slavonic custom.

While I was travelling over the Orenburg steppes, snow had covered Kuibyshev and the Volga had frozen solid. The progress of the Germans also stopped and the Slav meetings in Saratov proved that something was left of the old Slav community besides the *bania*. Unfortu-

nately, I could not attend these meetings and I merely compared the press reports about them with cuttings about similar meetings held in August. The first of them had been held in Moscow itself. The photographs of the earlier meetings and of the new ones, as well as the reports of the speeches, are so very similar as to be totally undistinguishable from each other. The cast was identical in each case; the old musician of Prague, Professor Nejedli; the handsome Ukrainian of Kiev, the playwright Kornijczuk; Wanda Wasilewska, far more popular in Russia than in her former homeland, which was Poland; the good-natured White Ruthenian Jank Kupala; and the same small bunch of Slovaks, Serbs and Croats in the chorus. The presence of some shady representatives of "independent" Montenegro rather put the production in the musical comedy class. It's unintentional, but you can't get away from it. A congress of the German lands attended by delegates of Gerolstein would also suggest Offenbach rather than Charlemagne. It is obvious, however, that Moscow has unearthed again the Slav tomahawk and unfurled the banners of Slavdom along with those of the Great Russian Fatherland.

"The Kremlin backs three horses all at once," said an eminent foreigner, obviously familiar with Ascot and Longchamps. "The first is called Kutuzov, or Suvorov—I've forgotten which, it does not really matter. At any rate it's Russian patriotism, defence of the Fatherland, struggle against the invader, 1812 all over again. The second horse is Slavdom II. It comes, of course, from the same stable as Slavdom I, which was well known though seldom successful on the turf of Imperial St. Petersburg. It is now in training for the next peace steeplechase. But

the Kremlin stables are vast and the Russian steppes are big enough for a whole stud of thoroughbreds, so there is a third horse as well. This one is called Red, or Comintern, and it has already scored some notable victories. Are you sure that it will not make an appearance in the great European stakes?"

I am not a sporting expert, but it does not take one to see that the native Russian horse is well ahead today. Slavdom II stumbled once or twice at the start and seems to be in bad form. No wonder, it quite lost touch with the Moscow turf after it was driven out some twenty years ago, with all its companions of a certain era. Only those ignorant of the last thirty or forty years of history can seriously believe that any Panslavism, even painted a bright red, has the slightest appeal for any Slav nation. Among the Poles, the Slav nation second in importance only to Russia, it was never popular, and the events of 1939 when the Red Army occupied half of the country were not likely to make it any more attractive. The mutual attitude of the Poles and Russians somewhat resembles that of two other nations: Portugal and Spain. The Spaniards periodically plan some kind of Iberic union; the idea fascinated both Alphonse XIII and the anarchists of the FAI. The Portuguese, on the other hand, desire nothing more than good neighbourly relations with Spain and suspect that the "Paniberia Union" would mean the end of their freedom.

But even the Czechs, strongly Panslavist under the Hapsburgs, turned their backs to Russia as soon as they recovered their independence. Between 1918 and 1938 Prague was planning a Danubian Federation, courted Paris, loved Geneva. In Yugoslavia the orthodox church

was the principal enemy of Soviet ambitions, while the local communists looked upon Moscow as the Mecca of Marx, but not of the Slavs. The Balkan nations lost interest in Russia after the disappearance of Austria and Turkey. Bulgaria, once a fervent admirer of Moscow, turned to friendship with Rome, Berlin and Budapest; Croat Zagreb did likewise; the Slovaks of Bratislava were antagonistic to Prague. The Germans secured the support of the Croats, Slovaks and—most enthusiastic of all—of the Ukrainians. Each of these nations has several divisions fighting on the Russian front, beside the Italians and Hungarians. Only in America some U. S. citizens of Slav origin are still sensitive to the old slogans about the unity and brotherhood of all Slavs. It is a creed which makes a strong appeal to those Western European politicians who would like to find an easy, ready-made solution of Eastern European problems.

In Russia itself the wide public is completely indifferent to the appeals of "Slav congresses." The small band of men ruling Russia finds inspiration in the communist idea, which is universal by definition and aims at embracing the world. It stresses the distinction between classes, not between nations. Under that theory a Chinese coolie should be closer to the Russian people than a Czech industrialist or a Yugoslav priest. It is also important to realise that the Russia of today is itself far less Slavonic than it was in the XIXth century. The Revolution, by bringing to the surface new classes, brought about the predominance of the Mongolian and Asiatic over the European and Slav elements. A glance at the pictures in the Soviet press, at soldiers, at a Soviet crowd, proves convincingly how little Slav is left in the Russia of today.

Tamerlane or Genghis Khan would probably appeal to those people far more than Kościuszko, Libusza or Prince Marko. Both without and within Russia Panslavism has lost what little attraction it has ever possessed. It used to be a power that could override differences of creed and opinion, but the totalitarian method changed all that. The great Slav congresses and manifestations of the XIXth century, held in Prague, Moscow and even Cracow, were attended by Catholic priest- and orthodox archimandrites, by Polish princes and Russian anarchists, by great men like Bakhunin and the Czech Palacky. The later "Slav congresses" organized by Moscow in wartime were no more than public sessions of the Slav section of the Comintern. That can make no sufficient claim to represent the Slavs. "Slavdom II" runs in the red colours of the Marx and Engels stable. The red band is rather tight and the colours are not universally popular.

"It's a mistake to speak about Kremlin's three racing horses," someone observed. "There are three horses, but they are not meant for racing, only for ceremonial parades. They are horses on which the commander of a conquering army can ride into a foreign capital." The first horse is the one which Timoshenko, or his successor, would ride on returning to Smolensk, to Kiev or to Minsk, for the word "Kutuzov" still brings an echo in those parts. But the Kremlin realises very well that a horse so heavily loaded with Russian past would hardly be the suitable mount for entering Warsaw, Prague or Belgrade. The triumphal march into these capitals would be made on another horse, Slavdom II. It would also be a great blunder to try to ride into Berlin or Dresden on a Slav horse. The crowd might throw bombs instead of flowers.

Horses would be changed at every stage of the campaign. Old banners would be stored and new ones unfurled with great pomp. Modern war requires a special weapon for every kind of offensive and the Russians know it very well. When the immediate objectives are Rostov on the Don, or Mojaisk, there is no better charger than old Kutuzov! But don't forget that the great horsemen of the steppes often changed their horses and that they sometimes rode them to death, having plenty of others to spare. Russia is today the largest steppe in the world. Have you read the newspaper published here, in Kuibyshev, for German prisoners? Read it carefully. You will find there no reference to Kutuzov and not a word about the Slavs, but a great deal about Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg, Engels and Father Marx. Don't you think that if and when the Soviet forces reach German territories, a German Soviet legion nursed in the meantime might make its unexpected appearance?

That may be so, if they ever get as far west. The Kremlin would be faced in that case with serious difficulties. Even the eastern provinces of Poland and the Baltic countries impressed the Soviet troops which occupied them in 1939 as lands of immense prosperity and high civilisation. The comparison was not favourable to Russia and to Marxism. Capitalism appeared in an entirely new light in the eyes of the Soviet soldiers who saw some of the poorest parts of "capitalist Europe." What would be the result of a direct contact with really prosperous western countries? What would be the result of a direct contact between Russian and German communists? The Kremlin had much trouble with heresies among its

own communists, but the western breed might be infinitely more troublesome.

At any rate the Slavophile movement in Soviet Russia is a twin brother of the Panslavism of Tsarist Russia, except that the latter used to be stronger, attracted more people and sounded a more hopeful, more genuine note. Like its present variety, it was not the only theory favoured by the rulers of Russia. The Romanovs had many dreams. Sometimes they dreamed about Byzantium and the Eastern Empire, the heritage of the Paleologues: they then named their sons with Greek names, pressed Turkey and supported Balkan revolutions. Sometimes they visualized Russia as the Guardian Angel defending the throne and the altar throughout the world; then they helped the Hapsburg monarchy against the Hungarians, threatened the July revolution, sent troops to repress the Belgian rising, supported the Carlists and Miguelists in Spain, and even tried to bolster up the divine authority of monarchy in Equador. At other times they were seized with the ambition of building a Slav Empire. They gave their sons Czech names, they opposed Vienna, they invited Czechs to St. Petersburg and they egged on the Ruthenians in Galicia and in Hungary to revolt. Even the Poles at such moments could expect a few kind words—though little else.

10. General Sikorski in Russia

THE Polish Prime Minister, General Sikorski, came to Russia in the beginning of December and his arrival was an event of some importance.

Soviet Russia did not want to recognise the independence of the countries wiped off the map of Europe by Hitler—Poland was one of them. In May, 1941, the Narkomindel had asked the Norwegian Legation in Moscow to leave the country, for Russia recognised the *fait accompli* of the occupation of Norway by the Germans. The same attitude was naturally even more marked with regard to Poland and the Central European countries. It is said that after the outbreak of war the Soviet government was toying with the idea of establishing in Russia, Polish, Czechoslovak, Yugoslav and Greek national committees and possibly even armies. That is why it was not anxious to recognise the legal governments of these countries in London. Eventually, however, they were recognised.

General Sikorski came by air from the south, via Baku and Astrakhan. We went to the aerodrome to meet him several times, for his aeroplane had been delayed by blizzards. When he did come, the Soviet authorities observed meticulously diplomatic etiquette, as they always do. On the snow covered airfield, a Soviet military band

played the Polish National Anthem. It sounded rather strange in such surroundings and in such circumstances.

On the following day, after paying a visit to President Kalinin, Sikorski went to Moscow. The whole party went in one air liner, the Premier, Ambassador Kot, General Anders, Major Cazalet and a few members of the Embassy and officers. Our large machine was escorted by Soviet fighters, for the front was not very far away and a meeting with Messerschmitts was not out of the question. It was a tiresome job for the fighters, which were naturally much faster than our Lockheed.

We saw Moscow in brilliant sunshine, with the roofs of the Kremlin glittering far away.

On the following day General Sikorski, Ambassador Kot and General Anders went to the Kremlin and held a long conference with Stalin. We waited impatiently for their return. When the Ambassador came back, he brought interesting news, including a surprise invitation—we were all asked to the banquet which was to be held next day at the Kremlin.

11. Night at the Kremlin

INTERNATIONAL correspondents know that the White House, No. 10 Downing Street, Palazzo Venezia and even Berchtesgaden are not altogether inaccessible; many journalists have been there and many still have a chance of seeing the inside of one of these houses. To meet Churchill or Roosevelt has always been relatively easy, to be received by Mussolini was not a particularly difficult achievement, and Hitler sees many people. Foreign correspondents know that the most inaccessible spot on earth is neither the Gaurisankar, nor the Kilimanjaro, but a small hillock on the Russian plain, encircled by a sluggish river, separated from the outside world by a mediaeval wall and full of abandoned churches and deserted palaces. Its name is the Kremlin.

Very few journalists have passed through the gates of the Kremlin. Very few indeed have had even the most casual meeting with that man, one of the most powerful in the world today, the man of a thousand legends, whose name conjures such loyalty and such hate—Stalin.

Mecca and Lhasa may be as inaccessible, but neither of them plays in the modern world a part comparable to that of the old Moscow castle. The Mikado or the Dalai Lama may be as difficult to meet as Stalin, but the Emperor of Japan is no more than a puppet in the hands of

military and industrial cliques, while the Dalai Lama is merely a religious ruler of half nomadic tribes. The personal decisions of the Mikado or of the Dalai Lama are not likely to influence world affairs, but those of Stalin have changed a great many such affairs and may change others.

No wonder that the entire day of the visit was only a prologue to the great evening. It was a brief, icy December day, but it seemed to go on for ever. Various adjustments of protocol took much time—new regimes seem to attach much more importance to such things than old ones. In the morning we went for a drive through Moscow covered with snow and scintillating with icicles. The day was fine, sunny, but rather bleak. General Sikorski was taken to the Worobjewski hill, from which Napoleon had looked down on burning Moscow. The great city was spread below, with its smoking factories on the outskirts and the steely band of the river cutting across it. The town was new by its smokestacks and old by its churches. Patrolling aeroplanes soared high above. In the streets I saw barricades far larger than any I had seen in Spain in 1936, in England in 1940, or anywhere else. But they had dust covers of snow, like unused furniture.

A few minutes before eight o'clock we came down from the general's suite. Cars were waiting in front of the hotel, in complete darkness. The huge streets, recently rebuilt, were quite empty. The town seemed dead and the blackout was scrupulously observed. The Kremlin seemed to be quite near, more mysterious, mediaeval and Asiatic than it was by daylight. The strange outline of its towers, the odd pattern of the walls seemed to be drawn in sepia on the silvery background of moonlit snow. Our cars flashed

along the empty streets and did not stop until they reached a tall tower, somewhat Gothic in design, a hundred yards ahead of Kremlin itself, the first gate. We stopped under it and the guards checked our driver's papers carefully. Then strong torches investigated the inside of the car, slowly, meticulously sweeping every corner. We drove across a kind of bridge over the former moat. Then there was another tower, a second gate and a new inspection as careful as the first. The silent beams of torches searched the inside of the car for some time. When we started again we heard the roar of the engines of our invisible motorcycle escort, accompanying us like black demon guardians. We were climbing the hill. It took only a few seconds. Then we stopped and the motorcycles grew silent.

Suddenly huge doors opened in front of us and a mass of dazzling light hit the darkness. It was an orgy of light. We saw in its blinding glare the great, high stairway of gold and white. A red carpet ran down its middle, like a scarlet river. Globes of light and chandeliers recalled the Paris Opera House. Silent, motionless NKWD men lined the stairs. We were in the hall of the Bolshoi Dvoriec—the Great Palace of the Kremlin. It was the overture of the spectacle. Fortunately on both sides of the hall there were cloakrooms, capable of holding the clothes of thousands of people; their walls were panelled with dark wood, which dulled the glare of the light; the world seemed more normal there. Under a large mirror there were brushes for clothes and for the hair. This struck me, for the custom of laying out brushes was quite English and seldom practised on the Continent, least of all in Russia. This touch

of modern Britain in the grim castle of Ivan the Terrible was most reassuring.

The end of the hall, which overwhelmed us with its lights and proportions, was also quite a relief to our eyes. The Great Palace of the Kremlin has been altered so many times and has known so many fires that parts of it have lost their original character. Catherine the Great, although she made St. Petersburg her residence, decided to put something of XVIIIth century France into the Byzantine and oriental shell of the castle. She ordered Bolshoi Dvoriec to be rebuilt in the style of the Louis. Later several other, less fortunate additions were made. The first of the rooms which we entered had been altered much later and in better taste, in Stalin's time. It housed the Parliament of the Soviet Union. The old St. Andrew's room, very long and oppressively low, wood panelled, was specially converted for that purpose. There were rows of benches, occupied on the great days by the representatives of the 160 nations known to the official Soviet statistics, the Uzbeks, Chvash, Zyrians, Buriats, Mordvians, Kazachs. The name of each of the delegates is engraved on a small metal plate and in front of every seat there is a small loudspeaker, to help in hearing the speeches made at the other end of the room, without using ordinary loudspeakers. The Bolsheviks delight in such gadgets. The Soviet parliament looked rather like some of the luxury hotels in smart resorts, which live only for a few weeks every year and relapse into a long sleep of many months.

We passed through the next rooms so quickly that we should have had difficulty in finding our way back. They

reminded us in turn of Victorian palace hotels, empty corridors in cold office buildings and antique drawing rooms lost in big country houses. The Bolshoi Dvoriec was becoming more magnificent as we went on; the frozen figures of the NKWD officials in their drab uniforms and softly treading snow boots of white felt were more numerous. They stared at us with impersonal indifference.

Finally we stopped under a vast ceiling, full of gilt, colour and light. Huge chandeliers glittered with crystal. The long, white table was covered with glass, silver and red flowers. I caught somewhere a glance of pillars of green marble or malachite. It was a colourful, rich picture, overloaded with glamour. Then I saw over the heads of General Sikorski, Ambassador Kot and General Anders, who led our procession, a small group of men approaching us through a long row of rooms on the opposite side of the banqueting hall.

They walked huddled together—or so it seemed—rather like a gang of workmen coming for a change of shift. Most of them wore dark clothes, so that the figure of a broad man of middle height, in a light suit buttoned up to the neck, stood out at once. A big black moustache, a crop of greyish hair over a broad forehead,—Stalin.

One is always surprised to see that the things we know from a thousand illustrations are just as we expected them to be. Karel Capek was right when he said that one is invariably filled with amazement at seeing a leaning tower in Pisa, gondolas in Venice and a great arch of triumph in Paris, which prove that the picture postcards did not lie. What is Stalin like? Well, he is exactly like his portraits of which there are thousands all over Russia, or like himself in the picture of Low's cartoons. There is a vast dif-

ference between the Soviet Union as it is imagined by people abroad and actual fact, but there is none at all between the popular idea of Stalin's appearance and the truth. His hair is liberally sprinkled with white, but not his bushy eyebrows and characteristic moustache. He may be a shade stouter than he appears to be on most of his portraits. I did not see his pipe, but he smoked many cigarettes. What does it matter? Ambassador Kot introduced each of us in turn and Vishinsky added a few words in Russian. I could not see very well the introduction of my predecessor, so I was rather surprised when the great man shook my hand and simply introduced himself, saying, "Stalin." I did not know whether I was supposed to tell him at that point my own name, with which Stalin was likely to be somewhat less familiar than I was with his. The surprise was characteristic of the mixed simplicity and pomp of the evening at the Kremlin.

Then we shook the hands of men whom we had never met before, but whose faces were well known to us. The portraits of the members of the powerful Politbureau, adorning the walls of so many offices between Odessa and Vladivostok, the pictures carried at the head of May Day parades, the photographs from the first pages of the Pravda and Izvestia—all came to life, talked and shook each others' hands. All the gods of the atheist Valhalla and of the Red Olympus, who appear to the crowd once a year in holy Mecca—Moscow—in the Red Square, at the tomb of the prophet Lenin, were in the room. Hitler could have materially improved his chances if he had scored a direct hit on that night. There was Molotov looking much older than in the pictures of himself; silent, collected Kaganovich in the uniform of a Soviet railwayman;

Stalin's Georgian countryman, dark Mikoyan, a small, rubicund man with gleaming eyes; Beria, the head of the NKVD. There were some officers of the highest rank, but they seemed to be somewhat in the background.

I happened to be near General Anders who seemed to be the tallest man in the room. He was acting as interpreter in the Polish-Russian conversation between Sikorski and Stalin. After a while Molotov and Vishinsky took charge of General Sikorski, and Stalin began talking to Ambassador Kot.

"... it happened sometimes," said Stalin, "that some nations were driven out of their original ancient territories. Take East Prussia. I think one half of it was inhabited by Poles and the other by Lithuanians. . . ."

Ambassador Kot, obviously referring to the beginning of their conversation, asked Stalin what would happen after the war to the Serbo-Lusitians. They are a Slavonic tribe of several hundred thousand people, living in the centre of present Germany, a little north of Czechoslovakia. They are a Slav reserve on old Slav lands which the Germans conquered. In 1919 this tribe was much discussed at Versailles, and the Czechs took a considerable interest in them. But Stalin, even if he knew about these Slavs, did not seem to be particularly interested in their fate. Unfortunately just when the conversation was promising to take an interesting turn thanks to Stalin's reference to East Prussia, I was recalled by one of my embassy colleagues. They were putting the finishing touches to a Polish-Soviet declaration of friendship which was being drafted in the next room. I was furious to be put on diplomatic fatigue just when there was a fascinating journalistic job on hand. But then I could never have got

there as a reporter, except perhaps in a crowd of hundreds of people.

However, after returning, and before sitting down at the table, I had another good look at one of the greatest men living. I have always believed that even insignificant details have a certain meaning when a great man is concerned. The old interest in trifling details of the lives of the great, spread once by gossip and now by the press, does not seem to be as futile as we might think it at first. Trifles, mannerisms, habits may reveal much of a man. Short of other evidence, they may help to build up a picture of character and mind. It is a work of detection and reconstruction of a whole from fragments. I had no better occupation that night than to watch the dictator of Red Russia and the Kremlin of old Russia. The inaccessibility of both only whetted my curiosity.

I observed Stalin for several minutes. He talked little and quietly. He listened carefully. Now and then he would leave the talking groups and stand aside, alone. He would then light a cigarette and smoke it alone. He was in a desert of his own. Nobody dared to break his silence or his solitude. Stalin was always the first to end it, with a joke or remark addressed to someone by name. The person so addressed would join him for a brief conversation and then Stalin returned to his guest—Sikorski. His whole bearing, characterised by the simple introduction with the word "Stalin," was modest and unpretentious, but he seemed to impress all those around him as a giant would pigmies, or a god, mortals. They all saw him without looking at him, they thought about him when talking about something else. One felt that they were all ready to carry out his orders at any moment. Stalin himself looked

rather like a man who wishes his thoughts and desires to be guessed before they were formed instead of having to issue orders. Complete calm, determination, ability to shrink from nothing, nothing whatsoever—these were the qualities one could discern in him that evening.

According to the French, clothes reveal their wearer. Stalin was dressed in his usual buttoned-up vest and trousers tucked into big Russian boots. Some things which are unnoticeable in photographs could be observed at close quarters. His clothes, although apparently simple, were very neat. The beige cloth of which they were made was obviously of the finest quality and texture. The trousers, though tucked in Russian fashion, were beautifully creased. The boots were very well made. Even his heavy strong hands were carefully groomed and had an expression of their own. There was a meticulous finish about it all. One of my friends, who has lived in Berlin and saw Hitler several times, told me that his clothes looked rather as though he had bought them off the peg and did not take care to match the different pieces. Nobody could say that about Stalin.

At last we sat down. I easily found the card with my name, for which I looked, with unerring instinct, at the lowest end of the table. Stalin sat at the other end, on the opposite side, so I was able to continue my observation. He had at his right General Sikorski, at his left Ambassador Kot, and Molotov opposite.

My neighbors were both Soviet generals, one of them an important figure, General Zukov, serving both in the army and in the NKWD, with whom General Anders had much to do. The table was laid out with rich simplicity. On

lovely table cloths of Dutch linen I saw plates of the Moskva Hotel, an old pattern of faded grapes and leaves marked Imperial Manufacture of St. Petersburg. Only the Imperial monograms were different. There were some pieces with the N. II of the last Emperor, surmounted by the crown of the Tsars and some with A. III, recalling that fearsome bearded giant, Alexander III. In the centre of the table there were old crystal vases and heavy silver jugs of marvellous workmanship. The table silver, on the other hand, was modern, with the hammer and sickle. In front of each of us there was a long menu, in Russian and in French. Each guest also had his own tray of hors d'oeuvres and his own bottles of various drinks.

Habitues of international banquets certainly would not think the dinner at the Kremlin dull or monotonous. Among the servants I recognised some of the waiters from the Moskva Hotel; of course it is not a hotel in the accepted meaning of that term, but rather a special government hospitality house, reserved for few people. They wore no livery, only white steward's jackets. Some of them spoke French.

I learned later that the Kremlin has no team of its own footmen, but borrows them from the official hotel when they are needed for a big reception. There was something else which suggested that the profession of valet had no bright future in the country; each of us had his own "zakuski" and his own beverages. It meant that the "help yourself" principle was not unknown to Kremlin banquets. As a compromise in favour of Western methods, the same "zakuski" and drinks were also served by the men in the white jackets. Thus there were two ways of

obtaining the varied salads and famous Russian fish—the salmon, *bieluga*, *siomga*, and, of course, caviare of all possible colours and of the best quality. They were washed down with Russian brandy, bitter “zubrovka” vodka, Moscow vodka and the best of all “riabinovka,” the red vodka.

It was the best moment for looking round the room, before the speeches, between one helping of caviare and the next. The room in which we sat, the old St. Catherine’s hall, belonged to the Frenchified, luxurious part of the Bolshoi Dvoriec. It had a rich rococo ceiling of gold and plaster; its walls were covered with slightly faded strawberry coloured fabric. Each of the walls was adorned at the top with an oval medallion, enlaced with a mauve ribbon with the Russian words “Za liubov k’otieczestvu”—For Love of Country. I guessed that it was the hall of the Order of St. Catherine, instituted by the Empress as a decoration for distinguished ladies of the court. The dull red and gold pleasantly reflected the light, which gleamed on the splendid parquet floor and streamed past the thick green columns. Then it vanished in the depth of countless rooms, in a reddish twilight. It was a Versailles that lacked the superb frailness and lightness of French art. Just as Potsdam and Sans Souci, though French in design, are stamped with Prussian gloom and stiffness, so this piece of France dragged into the heart of old Russia by a German princess seemed to be totally un-French. It was like a French gown cut not in light silk of Lyons, but in the thick eastern brocade of the pontifical robes of orthodox bishops and of the hieratic costumes of the fat boyars of old Moscow. It was gorgeous, impressive, magnificent; it was heavy, pompous and menacing. Every-

thing had been done to make it a Versailles, but it was still the Kremlin.

The gargantuan masses of food completed the picture. The Caucasian and Crimean wines, the brandies and liqueurs from the Persian border had a flavour of their own. In the dishes labelled with French names one felt the background of traditional Russian cooking, rich, spicy and nourishing. Courses followed each other quickly, or I should say, simultaneously. The dinner proper started with two soups to choose from, an excellent Polish borsch, which is clear and thin, unlike the Russian variety, and a Russian fish soup known as "shchi." My gastronomic patriotism left me no choice.

After the soups there came meats, poultry, fish and game in a tremendous variety. The first bottles were replaced with new ones and glasses were filled again and again. Conversation became louder, freely assisted by gesture and mostly terminated by guffaws of laughter. The Polish and Russian officers seemed to be the first to come to a mutual understanding. The hall of St. Catherine saw more life than it probably had for a long time.

I remember few of the countless toasts which followed in the second part of the banquet. They seemed episodes lost in the rich, luscious picture of that strange feast in which proletarian simplicity was mixed with shadows cast by a dead Empire; which was held somewhere between Europe and Asia. Molotov was the continual speaker. He was tireless in toasting every one of the Polish guests in turn. The last of his toasts in that series was in honour of the young generation of Polish officers. Molotov very cautiously addressed it to the only Polish junior officer present, Captain Klimkowski, aide de camp to General Anders. The

unexpectedly honoured hero, a typical cavalry officer, was absolutely stunned when he heard his name in an official toast. He well might be. A few months earlier he had been a political prisoner of the Soviet, in the Lubianka gaol: now he was in the same city of Moscow, but at the Kremlin, sitting in full uniform at the table with the rulers of Soviet Russia and Polish ministers, toasted by the premier of Russia, Molotov. Rather too much for a gallant cavalry subaltern. The end of the toast embarrassed the Captain even more. Molotov lifted his glass towards him, which meant, according to the local custom, that Klimkowski should touch the Prime Minister's glass with his own. He was at least a dozen places away from him, so that he had to get up and walk along the room. Klimkowski had just started his ceremonial procession, when he was faced with a new problem. Stalin had risen from his seat and made a few steps towards Klimkowski. That was the limit. Stalin happened to be on the opposite side of the table, so that Klimkowski was in a dilemma—should he carry on his march towards Molotov, or should he turn back to Stalin? He decided on the latter course and I saw the brave Captain walk carefully, perhaps even shyly, along the slippery, lustrous floor towards Stalin and touch his glass with his own. Then he started a new journey around the table in his cavalry boots, which did not strike any one there as odd at dinner, marching towards Molotov, to perform the ritual again. After that our friend was allowed at last to return to his seat, which he did, probably with considerable relief.

The climax of the evening was, of course, Stalin's speech. His way of speaking was as unconventional as himself. Stalin is a peculiar speaker with a method of his

own. He asked questions, and proceeded to answer them, he used picturesque language and anecdotes. He talked like a teacher, who partly instructs his class and partly hints at certain conclusions. He dealt with the relations between Poland and Russia. There were—he said—many quarrels, conflicts and mutual claims. There was a time when the Poles held Moscow; then the Russians took Warsaw. . . .

“Well,” interjected Ambassador Kot, who as a historian knows the story of Polish occupation of Moscow, in the XVIIth century. “The Poles only stayed in Moscow for a few months, but the Russians held Poland for over a hundred years. Why did you stay with us so long?”

Then Stalin passed to two topics for which he is said to have a sentimental weakness, his revolutionary youth and Lenin. The Russians, he said, did not appreciate the sensitiveness of the Poles, a nation so persecuted by the Imperial Russian government, that it learned to hate everything Russian. “I did not understand it myself,” said Stalin, “but Lenin did.” Then he told us a story to which everybody listened in absolute silence, as they did throughout the speech.

“The Poles helped me to cross the frontier between Russian and Austrian Poland, some years before 1914. I was visiting Lenin, who was hiding in southern Poland. He understood the Poles. I didn’t. Once, when I was travelling in Galicia, the train stopped at the station about lunch time. I was hungry and I had a quarter of an hour’s time, so I went to the restaurant and ordered luncheon. I sat down and waited. My neighbour on the right-hand side was served, the one on the left too, but I was not. Even people who came much later got their

meals, but I did not. It was obviously intentional. Finally, two minutes before the train was due to leave they brought me a plate of soup. I am a hot tempered Georgian. I threw two Austrian crowns on the table and I turned the plate of soup upside down. Then I walked out, still hungry. In Zakopane I told Lenin about this incident, abusing the Poles. Lenin," continued Stalin, "heard my story and then asked: 'What language did you speak to them?' 'What language? Why, Russian, of course.'

"Then Lenin began to laugh and laughed at me for a long time: 'You don't understand these things. Don't you see that after all they suffered from the Russian government the Poles must hate the Russian language? Like every oppressed nation, they have just cause for their resentment. That is why you were served last.'

"I understood," Stalin concluded his toast, "Lenin's lesson of knowledge of other nations' susceptibilities and of respect for them. That is why I drink this toast to General Sikorski and his party, our guests, to their prosperity, to the honour of the famous Polish army and the liberation of Poland from enemy hands. Poland will rise after this war greater than ever."

It was the end of the banquet. The dessert, according to Russian custom, was served in the next room, a large red drawing room furnished in Louis Philippe style. The two-headed Imperial eagle was still spreading its black wings over the gilded doors between the two rooms. The Polish and Soviet diplomats were still having a trifling discussion about the wording of the Polish-Soviet declaration, which was to be signed presently. The declaration was not, strictly speaking, an international treaty at all, merely a vague expression of an improvement of relations

between the two countries. Nevertheless the formalists on both sides insisted on a few purely literary details. I had to take the matter up with Molotov. After listening to both sides of the case, he started a train of reminiscence:

"Ah, when we were signing the pact with the Germans . . ." He meant, of course, the famous Stalin-Ribbentrop pact, signed at the Kremlin on August 23rd, 1939, the pact of partition of Poland, which opened Hitler's way into Europe; not a particularly pleasant reminder. I interrupted him and said: "Don't you think, Mr. People's Commissar, that the Soviet-German agreement was not among the more fortunate treaties concluded by the Soviet government?"

Molotov, who obviously had made his remark without ulterior motive, without realising how delicate was the subject, protested his good intentions.

"And besides," I added, "We hope that our present agreement may be more lasting than those signed by Mr. Ribbentrop. . . ."

Finally the literary trifle was dealt with, just in time, for everybody was rising from his seat. We all went into the dark pit of the endless rooms of the Bolshoi Dvoriec, from which the party of the Politbureau had emerged a few hours before to meet us in St. Catherine's hall.

The revolution had never passed there. Old Louis XVIth furniture, dark Dutch paintings, dimmed Venetian mirrors in gilt frames, all languished in the boredom of forgetfulness. It was another of the great country mansions, erected at enormous expense and then abandoned by new generations of heirs, who preferred less antique and glamorous houses. Over a hundred years before the October revolution the Bolshoi Dvoriec was left

by the Court, in favour of the palaces of St. Petersburg. The Revolution brought the capital back to Moscow, but it did not return the Bolshoi to the glory of the first Romanovs. The Imperial furniture was still there; only the silent agents of the NKWD, fully armed, hovering in the background of the great dim rooms, represented the New Power.

Simplicity was certainly not the keynote of Russian architecture. After passing through countless rooms we went along strange corridors, stairs and passages, with unexpected turnings and concealed doors, probably much older than the Versailles part of the palace, perhaps dating from the time of the old Moscow of the boyars, before Peter the Great. It was a labyrinth as mysterious as that of the Minotaur and hardly less sinister.

Then we returned to modernity. There was a small projection-room with a white screen and deep, soft armchairs. Stalin sat beside General Sikorski, Kot next to Molotov and others occupied the remaining seats. Servants brought cigars, coffee and sweets. Stalin and Sikorski talked over a small piece of white board; it was no map and no draft treaty, but the program of the show. The lights went out and we saw on the screen newsreels of the recent October parade in Moscow, of Stalin's speeches and then of Sikorski's arrival in Russia, of his welcome in Kuibyshev, in Moscow. . . .

The Bolsheviks, with their usual ambition to emulate the tempo of America, produced shots of the most recent events, taking us up almost to dinner itself, practically to the very moment when we entered the cinema room. The Kremlin has little to learn from Hollywood. It even surpassed it in sound effects, for as we sat down in si-

lence, watching the show, we distinctly heard a distant booming rumble.

Uhuuu . . . Uhuuuu. . . .

The din and noise of the banqueting room were over and we heard the thunder well. After three years of practice we had no difficulty in recognising it. We looked at each other and the show went on. After all, the front was not more than 15 miles away. The Germans had pushed particularly far on that day on the Moscow sector. Heavy guns were at work somewhere in the night and their roar shook the thick walls of the Kremlin and penetrated to the private cinema of Stalin.

It was nearly twelve when we rose from our seats and began the return journey to the main entrance, through the old rooms, even more dead and somnolent than before. The table in St. Catherine's hall had been cleared already and the life which had filled the room for a while with the noise of feasting and the smell of food was gone, leaving it as dead as the rest of the palace. Only the lights in the entrance hall were still as bright as before and the proximity of the entrance was heralded by the increasing number of armed, silent and motionless figures along our route.

The night was no longer as dark as before. The full moon hung high up in the sky. The view of the river Moskva in its bed of granite, of the sleeping, deserted city and of streets white under snow was eerie and fantastic as ever. In order to assist at the signature of the Polish-Soviet declaration, we had to pass to another of the Kremlin palaces, which housed Stalin's private office. It was too near to use the cars. I liked the walk through the

Kremlin courtyards, deep and black like canyons, between many churches, chapels, monasteries. All these temples were closed and obviously disused, or perhaps turned into museums. Seen at a distance, with their pear-like domes of various sizes and shapes, they gave to the Kremlin the appearance of a vision in a town of a thousand-and-one nights. At close quarters, they were more real and impressive, but not less fantastic. There was something grim and sinister, majestic and melancholy about that castle sanctuary of a religion doomed to death, in the holy city condemned to silence. In the moonlight, on gleaming snow, under a jet black sky, the Kremlin of the monasteries looked like the legendary city submerged by a magician's curse, only to show from time to time the summits of its towers deep under the water of a black, magic lake. It was no longer the Kremlin of the Soviet parliament and of Stalin. It was not the Kremlin of the great Catherine and French courtiers, nor even the old dark labyrinthine Kremlin of the boyars of Moscow. It was a hieratic, mysterious town, a holy city, like Lhasa, Mecca or the dead cities of pagodas and temples in Indo-China. It recovered all its greatness as the home of a creed, perhaps enriched by the torment of history, mysterious and aloof in the starlit frosty night.

We went up by lift and Stalin met us upstairs. He did not go out of the Bolshoi Dvoriec with us and yet he was ahead of us. How? Mystery. A secret well in keeping with the tradition of the Kremlin, of Russia and of the Soviets. In the large room with two big conference tables and walls covered with maps, rolled and unfurled like window blinds, the photographers were waiting and the documents were ready for signature. The statesmen put their

pens to the paper, there was a flash of magnesium and all was over.

Our hosts bade us farewell downstairs, as we were getting into the cars. The sound of rumbling engines made me suddenly realise that there still is outside the rectangle of red walls, another life, less monastic and monarchic, less intense and mysterious, less fascinating and more normal. The evening at the Kremlin was over and so was the tale of Scheherazade. Falling-asleep in my comfortable, warm, modern hotel room, I had a subconscious feeling of satisfaction at having seen it all and having finished with it. I felt like a spectator who rises from his seat after a splendid dramatic performance, superbly acted and staged, and yet feels glad that he does not have to live at Lady Macbeth's castle, nor at Hamlet's Elsinore.

12. The Winter and the Army

WINTER has begun in earnest. The icy blizzards of November and December have ceased. Heavy frost always means in Russia complete calm. Kuibyshev is swathed in snow and its wooden houses, with their wooden fences, are half their usual height. Snow is cleared only in a few streets and elsewhere narrow pathways are trodden in the deep snow by the pedestrians.

Already in December, when the thermometer dropped for the first time to 40° below freezing point, one could hear in the streets the amused and friendly warning: "Uncle, uncle, your nose is white."

Children on their way to school were particularly eager to share such news with passersby, but adults also gave warning, in somewhat more formal terms. A white nose is a very alarming symptom. It is the first sign of frostbite. One does not feel it at first, but others notice it at once. It is a kindness to warn a stranger.

But for the last few days people no longer look at each other's noses. Strangers meeting in the street, or in the long queues, which remain unaffected by the frost, or in the trams, which move with difficulty over ice coated rails, whisper one magic word: "Rostov."

Rostov is the watchword of the day, just as the name of Hess had been in Britain in the spring. A week ago the

Soviet armies drove the Germans out of Rostov. Six weeks earlier, the holding of the Germans at the gates of Moscow stood alone to kill the germs of panic. Now there is hope. Rostov is not only a vital strategic point. It is also a very Russian city, well known and popular. That is why its fall had come as a painful shock. The recapture of Rostov was a strong tonic for national pride. A moment such as this shows how strong the patriotic feelings have remained in Russia.

The Bolsheviks did not miss their opportunity of converting the raw material of military success into the desirable product known as optimism and confidence. We knew perfectly well that at the present stage of the war the winter offensive from Moscow and Rostov could nibble at the Germans, but could not rout them. But Rostov is presented as the first stage in a great march. There are hints of Kharkov, Crimea, White Ruthenia.

In this country, which has emerged only recently from illiteracy, films and posters are still more effective than the printed word. Rostov has already become the subject of special short war films, stressing particularly the German atrocities in Rostov. There is no doubt that the Reichswehr did its best to help the Soviet cameramen in their grisly work. The streets of Rostov are full of murdered civilians. Snow has already nearly covered these pathetic, frozen corpses, spread like bundles of rags on the thresholds of ruined houses. Rostov must have been a fine old city—even the gutted ruins give an idea of its beauty. The Russian film producers managed to convey to the public a very convincing picture of what German rule looks like. The diaries found on some of the dead German soldiers, in which they cynically expound their creed

of robbery, murder and *Herrenvolk* domination, are revealing enough, but the pictures can tell even more. The corpses of raped girls, tortured old men, bayoneted babies are shown. There are closeups in plenty and the camera lingers a long time over the horribly mutilated bodies. We foreigners sometimes feel sorry for the miserable people who, after their death, are presented in obscene exhibition to millions. At the time of the Abyssinian campaign the Italian government attached some very realistic photographs to the diplomatic notes in which it tried to justify its action in Africa; they presented the treatment of Italian prisoners by the Abyssinians, including the form of sexual scalping traditionally favoured by the Ethiopian warriors. But these were photographs for restricted and official use. They never appeared in the press, still less on the screen. Things are different here. The Soviet government displays realistically the horrors of the German invasion, without reticence or squeamishness. The atrocity films are seen by young girls and children, but mainly by soldiers. I have seen them at a special show for diplomats. The atmosphere was one of hushed and embarrassed horror. Later I saw the same pictures in an ordinary cinema. The audience was no longer silent. Broken cries rose from all parts of the hall. They were at first shouts of indignation and then of wild, cruel hate. Russians still remember the atrocities committed by Napoleon's army. And Napoleon never overran as large a part of Russia as Hitler seized. Napoleon ordered all looters to be shot and he did not approve cruelty practised for its own sake. The outrages of the French soldiery of 1812 nevertheless became the subject of popular legend. Those

of the Germans, infinitely worse, have been recorded by the camera.

I may be suspected by the readers of devoting too much time to the Soviet documentary war films. There are, however, things which may have far reaching consequences, even though they do not appear to be intrinsically important. Scores of such films are now circulating in Russia. Millions of people see the Germans as a nation of murderers, robbers and sadists. Russia has never before seen the Germans in that guise. The war of 1914-1918 did not stir up particularly strong hate; the Allied powers were disliked as much as the Germans; the civil war was cruel enough; communism, at first genuinely international, did not lay much stress on antagonisms between nations. Now things are quite different.

Only a few months have passed since the outbreak of this new war. Nobody in Russia wanted a war against Germany. Next to America, which has a special appeal as a country of youth, progress and democracy, Germany was undoubtedly the most popular foreign country in Russia, up to the very outbreak of war. In the first weeks after the invasion there was even a certain feeling of regret at having to fight this civilised nation of scholars and engineers. German fascism was blamed for everything—an easy formula, which was acceptable both to the government and the masses. Now, however, the popular attitude had radically changed. People who—thanks to the film—saw German murderers at work, will not find it easy to dissociate Nazis from Germans. It is obvious to the spectator that the atrocities were not the work of some secret gang of evil “Nazis,” but that they

were perpetrated by the German army as a whole, a cross section of the whole nation. Anyone who saw the sadism of the invaders in all its stark horror will find it very difficult to believe the myth of "good Germans"—acceptable to secluded Bloomsbury and Oxford. Anyone who saw the butchery of Rostov—and those of Kiev, Odessa, Minsk, Smolensk and a thousand villages—will associate it for the rest of his life with the German nation.

The films are well devised from a psychological point of view. Each one of them has the same kind of ending; Soviet soldiers escorting German prisoners. After the crime, the picture presents the culprits, vanquished, miserable, freezing. Justice and revenge at the hand of the Red Army. The Soviet soldiers appear in the armour of St. George slaying the dragon. It is a very effective approach. If it were needed to forge links of mutual sympathy and brotherhood between the army and the nation, films like these could do it. But there is hardly any need to strengthen the existing unity of purpose.

Kuibyshev seems to be an important military depot, for there are new formations in the town almost every day. After some time they are moved to destinations which remain unknown to us. The troops which I have seen here are different from those I saw in Moscow some months ago.

Perhaps the soldiers whom I had seen in Moscow were overawed by the capital, which must make a strong impression on men used to the modest and bleak provincial towns of Russia. But I believe that there were also other reasons for the difference of bearing which I discerned in Kuibyshev. When I saw the Soviet soldiers in Moscow,

the war had barely started. The army had just begun to fight. It was matched against the army which had swept the whole of Europe in two years. The first weeks of the war were a long sequence of Russian reverses. Now things are different. The army is no longer fresh. It has passed its baptism of fire and passed it with honour. The Germans, although they are not yet beaten, are no longer the undisputed victors in every battle.

A glance at the young, very young officers and men of the crack divisions, which received recently the coveted title of "Guards," is enough to see the difference. The soldiers, particularly the tank men and the fliers, have a new self-confidence and pride. During my recent journey to Saratov and Buzuluk I met many of them. I was amazed by the frankness of their questions and remarks. Generally speaking, Soviet citizens are extremely cautious in conversations with foreigners, and the higher the position of a man, the greater his reticence. The members of the armed forces were even more circumspect and careful than the civilians. They remembered the fate of Tukhachevski and his companions. Now they are bolder than anyone else. They do not hesitate to hint that many things will have to be changed after the war. They admit that there are good examples abroad which Russia might do well to follow. There are things in Russia which will have to be abolished. They are not very explicit and seldom explain what is to be borrowed from other nations—may be new territories? They do not state what or who will have to be liquidated in Russia itself. They invariably criticise the Soviet bureaucracy and its overgrowth. They complain about the shortage of such commodities as good clothes, watches and other small articles of everyday use,

which are not manufactured in Russia. When the Soviet soldiers marching into the Baltic countries and Eastern Poland saw that such goods were plentiful and cheap there, their views about communism underwent a revision.

Sometimes I heard the remarks: "Take religion. If the old people believe in God, why not let them?" When I observed that the Soviet constitution does guarantee religious freedom, there was a shrug of the shoulders: "Eh, constitution . . ." I suppose most constitutions have parts which are no more than a promise.

In one of the recent Soviet films there was a scene in which a peasant mother, bidding farewell to her soldier son, made three times the traditional sign of the cross over his head. People drew my attention to that scene. "Does it not strike you as significant that a mother was *allowed* to bless her son joining the Red Army with the sign of the cross?" I think that this does not mean a very great deal. The mother was an ancient peasant, all wrapped up in blankets and shawls. There is a certain amount of latitude allowed to very old people in religious matters. But the son was a young man, brought up under the Soviet regime. He had gone through the Soviet schools, in which he was taught that "religion is the opium of the people." He may have belonged to the Komsomol. Until recently he would have been supposed to protest against his mother's "dark superstition." Now he is allowed to accept her blessing indulgently. That is all the difference.

There are, of course, sceptics who will maintain that this was merely a temporary concession of the Soviet government and that after the war there will be no such laxity of Marxist and anti-religious discipline. I am inclined to doubt it. Religion, once it is allowed to return, will come

with the slow, imperceptible but steady power of a rising tide. The history of all the religious persecutions proves it.

I looked with interest at the young Soviet soldiers. They excited my curiosity not only as the first men to have held their own against the Germans on land, as the R.A.F. had done in the air. They were members of an army which, although it was young, and organised in a country without a long tradition of civilisation, without a well established industry, contrived to outdistance all others in modernity of equipment, unhampered by the dead weight of sluggish staffs and brass hat mentality. The Soviet army is interesting also for another reason. It is the first force which has arisen in Russia for a good many years outside the Party, its weapon—the NKWD, and its leader—Stalin. All the other forces which have appeared before were systematically crushed and eventually disposed of. This one was given its chance by the outbreak of war. The more severe the war, the greater will be the part it is going to play. Every misery brought by the war turns the eyes of the public to the soldiers and every victory endows them with new authority. The price of blood, which they are paying in full, gives them the right to think their own thoughts and speak their minds, even if their ideas do not conform to the official dictation.

The Red Army officers are the men of the future. Nobody can foretell what kind of Russia we may see at the end of the terrible struggle. But whoever may rule Russia in the future will require the support of some body of men. Even the Bourbons, when they returned to the throne after Napoleon's abdication, had to use the services of Napoleon's marshals and prefects. They had no

other alternative. Even taking into account the most fantastic and far-fetched possibilities we cannot visualise any Russian government ruling without the help of a section of the Russian nation itself. The size of the country prohibits such an alternative. And there is no other group capable of government, except the men of the army. I do not think any of these contingencies even remotely probable, but even should the Romanovs return to the throne of Russia, even if Hitler should conquer and rule it by his gauleiters, even if some new Petain should establish a Russian Vichy, even if the national movements succeeded in breaking up Russia into the various components of the Caucasus, Ukraine, White Ruthenia, Komi and others—in all these cases one thing would remain unaltered. Every government would have to use the services of this young generation in uniform, which grows stronger with every Rostov, Mojaïsk, Stalingrad. The blame for the defeats of Russia is placed on its rulers. The victories are credited to the army. They pave the way for its accession to power.

13. Four Russian Portraits

A Russian

The man sitting on the right hand of the ambassador, Mr. Kot, our guest in Kuibyshev, is to Russian literature what Timoshenko is to the army. He stands, officially and incontestably, at its summit. Whatever may happen, that man will stay. He will remain, as he remained after the storm that swept away the throne, the church and property. He knows the emigrés' trail, he knows all about the Paris of Russian restaurants, Russian taxi drivers and Russian misery. He returned from far away. Today he is a guest entertained at the Kremlin, his works penetrate everywhere and his teaching is far more welcome to the young Russian mind than the political lecture or the statistical diagram. In old Russia his name counted among those of the oldest nobility, descended from the boyars and not made by a Tsar's passing whim or court intrigue. Men of his family could recall not only times when they served the Tsar, but also occasions when they and their kin deposed, crowned and advised other Tsars. In the last century the heraldic pride of the family was enriched by literary fame. Our guest's grandfather had been one of the leading playwrights of Russia; his famous relative was to the novel what Homer had been to the epos, Shakespeare to the drama and Heine to

lyrical poetry. Our present guest himself survived not only the Revolution, but also the successive "purges" and grew in fame with every year, with every new batch of Soviet youth coming out into life, with every volume he published. His books are Russian best-sellers and one of them became the literary Bible of young Russia.

His part has much in common with that played by Chateaubriand after the French Revolution. He, too, was deeply rooted in the past of France, had been exiled, then conciliated with the Revolution—and returned to lead the nation along new, moderate lines. Only Chateaubriand wanted to conciliate new France with the Church and the Throne, with what he considered eternal in religion and rightful in authority. Chateaubriand was universal. The Russian is patriotic. He does not attempt to rehabilitate the church or the monarchy; he glorifies Russia and gives her homage even when she appears in liturgic robes and the Monomach's pointed headdress. He recalls the Minins and Kutuzovs, their struggles and their problems, to the new Russia of Timoshenkos and Zukovs, airmen and tractor drivers.

He has written much, but he has changed even more. It was a difficult task at first. But for several years, now that the word "Fatherland" is in favour for the first time since the Revolution, the wind of history fills his sails, tearing down those of other writers, whose day is past. Now the hurricance of war carries him at an even greater pace. Every day that fills the chasm between the past and the present lifts him higher. I do not know whom I will find when I return to Russia after the war. I do not know what system I will find and who will survive or who will not. But I believe that whatever happens, one man will

remain on the surface, the author of the monumental historical narrative about Peter the Great, the Tsar-reformer, Alexey Tolstoy.

His appearance itself is part of his psychological and literary personality. He is large and heavy, with a large fleshy face, hair brushed low behind the ears, somewhat as the Russian clergy wear it. He speaks in a calm, deep bass, very Russian in its tone and power. He looks at people with slanting, Tartar eyes, also very Russian. He is known throughout Russia as a gourmet, of the Parisian type. It is amusing to see him pouring out wine, appreciating the finer points of a dish, or smoking a good cigar. People talk in Russia with pride about Tolstoy's villa near Moscow and another in Crimea, about his car, his beautiful carpets and other riches. The Russians always like to boast of the prosperity of their writers, unlike another Slav nation, which was almost proud of the fact that Adam Mickiewicz lived in poverty and the poet Syrokomla was allowed to starve. But even the Russians are sometimes indignant about "Tolstoyian luxuries" and envy is not unknown in Russia. Some jealous Russians told a Pole that Tolstoy had bought in Wilno, as soon as it was occupied by the Soviet forces, 50,000 roubles worth of wines.

"Poor fellow," replied the Pole. "Wilno has always had rather bad wine. But when he comes to Wilno as our guest, when we shall have returned there, he will get much better wine than that."

Now Tolstoy is in Tashkent and the wicked victims of envy spread the rumour that he is buying the finest eastern carpets of which there are still plenty in Samarkand and Bukhara. Tolstoy's life is the object of general in-

terest, even in its most intimate details. His vitality is a contrast with the reserve and apathy of the new Russians. He recalls the wild exuberance of the Cossacks in Riepin's picture, or of the old merchants of Samara, who bathed in champagne the women brought from Paris, like the wine.

Tolstoy writes much, with the same abandon with which he eats, drinks and loves. He has recently written a drama about the Tsar Ivan the Terrible and the Polish King Stefan Batory, which was experimentally produced by Soviet theatres, but was deprecated by the critics on the ground that the author "flattered the Transylvanian adventurer on the Polish throne at the expense of the Great Ivan." It is a truly Shakespearan subject; the rivalry of a ferocious eastern tyrant and a western prince, a Transylvanian, educated at the university of Padua and elevated by the Polish nobility to the throne. The author brought out vividly the conflict between these two historical figures. He explained to us, gesticulating with his nervous, strong, heavy hands, his view of the matter.

Batory, of course, was not a Polish patriot—just as the Corsican, Bonaparte, was not a French patriot. Transylvania and Corsica were merely springboards. Poland and France, stages in a journey. Its goal was for Napoleon—Europe, and for Batory—the European east. Batory was a universalist, Ivan a particularist; Batory was the champion of progress and Ivan of *starina*. "*Starina*" is a beautiful and very Russian word. It means something that belongs to the past, that is doomed to go, but is nevertheless rather attractive.

Ambassador Kot added some historical details about Ivan and Batory. They seemed to interest Tolstoy only in so far as they illustrated the idea of his play. Observing

the pleasure which Tolstoy obviously took in wine, the ambassador asked with professorial pedantry: "Does alcohol assist literary work?"

"Oooh," resounded the rich bass. "It does indeed."

"And what helps more," asked the professor, "wine or vodka?"

The problem puzzled the great writer. He leaned back in the chair, he threw up his head, his whitish Nordic eyebrows came down over the Mongolian eyes, with an expression which contained something cruel. He pondered the question for a while and then, slowly, pronouncing each syllable, he boomed:

"Vino-o!"

And then, after an interval, he continued with a deep, guttural o:

". . . and vo-odka!" Then, either anxious to avoid the suspicion of indiscriminate liking for all spirits, or complying with the professor's scientific interest, he added: "Wine stimulates thoughts, and brandy with black coffee helps the ideas to take form."

He is a Rabelaisian and Pantagruelian figure, absorbing with equal eagerness a new glass of cognac, interesting historical facts, news from the front and from the kolkhozes, ever watchful and sensitive. Looking at him, we understand that he had to return to his country, that a man of his pattern could not live on the outskirts of life and that the existence of émigrés is always marginal. He is too Russian, both Slav and Mongol, to be able to live long outside of Russia. He took a risk to discover Russia beyond the Revolution. He returned and won his gamble.

He is always ready to coin new definitions and gen-

eralizations, sometimes striking, though perhaps too hasty. His theories may be superficial, for his studies and meditations may have been characterised by the same nervous haste as his gestures and eating. But they are convincing and appeal to the imagination, their appeal to simple minds is probably particularly strong. And Russia is not a country of intellectualism.

We talked about Leo Tolstoy and Dostoievski. Is Dostoievski supposed to be officially approved in present Russia?

Alexey shook his head: "That was the case before, but not now. I think that Dostoievski outdistanced Tolstoy. When the modern Russian wants to learn what life before the Revolution looked like, how the Tsars ruled and what happened in Napoleon's time, he reads Leo Tolstoy's 'War and Peace' or even 'Anna Karenina.' But the Russian wonders even more frequently about questions such as 'Who am I?' 'What sort of beings are we?' and then he seeks a reply to his psychological problems in the works of the author of 'Crime and Punishment' and 'The Brothers Karamazov'—Dostoievski."

Alexey Tolstoy was silent for a moment.

"But does the modern Russian worry about such problems? More often than the casual observer would think. The average Russian reads much and likes to talk about books. The average Russian remembers what he has read. Now a new class has grown up, the Soviet educated class."

Tolstoy was animated: "It was the misfortune of our revolution that a socialist system requires a numerous class of people who have an adequate intellectual training. The steppe needs shepherds; the tractors need drivers. That was the difference. But the old Russian intelli-

gentsia, although equal to that of Europe in some respects, was too scarce, too frail to deal with the problems of revolution. Moreover it opposed the socialist revolution: at any rate its major part did. It was therefore liquidated. . . .”

We saw in a flash the Russians of Paris, Belgrade, Prague, New York.

The stream of burning lava went on: “But now we have brought up a new generation of intelligentsia. It came straight from the people. Some of these new men were born in peasant huts, or in mountain villages, or in the tents of the nomadic tribes of the Tien-Shan steppes. They came from the mass, from the core of the nation. They are engineers, technicians, officials, officers. It is a young class, eager, inquisitive. It is the most interesting phenomenon in Russia, far more interesting than the Dnieprostroys, Magnitogorsks, canals and factories. It is man-made by revolution, and perpetuates the revolution which made him.”

Tolstoy stopped and said: “These men are an expression of Russia. They carry in them the eternal Russia.”

I know that these men are Tolstoy's readers. I know his works, “Peter the Great” in particular. I do not share young Russia's boundless enthusiasm for that book. It recalls the historical painting of the school of Munich. But one must realise that “Peter” is read in this country by people for whom history is as new as an aircraft factory for a native of Thibet. Tolstoy brings them into the tale gradually, beginning with the story of a Russian boy who slept on a stove and had to get up before dawn to harness the horses, before passing to the problems of European influence in the Russia of boyars. Many of

Tolstoy's readers still remember sleeping on a stove in a country cottage and harnessing horses before dawn. Such an opening is both familiar and encouraging for them, people who have just emerged from the amorphous mass of Russian peasantry. Then Tolstoy spreads out slowly the rich canvas of the period, but he takes good care to provide the new readers with familiar analogies. The anarchic Russia of the minority of Peter the Great recalls the Russia of the last Tsars; the people who opposed Peter's reform are very much like those whom Lenin threw down and Stalin dispatched: the men who rebuilt Russia under Peter had the blind determination, the ruthlessness and cruelty, the fanaticism and the indifference to obstacles in their future successors.

The West which thrives on Russian apathy, the West whose knowledge must be assimilated in order to surpass it—it is not only the West seen through the youthful eyes of the greatest of the Romanovs. It is also the West seen by millions of young Bolsheviks. Through ermine and brocade, through church incense and court balls, the reader faces the eternal problem of Russia. The young Komsomoletz who had grown up in the belief that all the Tsars were stupid despots like the last ones and that all the boyars were as anachronistic as those swept away by the revolution, discovers precursors of Lenin, predecessors of Stalin and forefathers of Timoshenko. The past is no longer darkness and chaos, while the present is not inaugurated by Marx alone. Things which were proscribed become dear. Tolstoy has good reason for stressing the cruel brutality with which Peter the Great reconstructed Russia, every one of his gory scenes carries the moral that ruthlessness and tyranny are necessary requisites of great

achievements. Cruelty and its apology are a striking feature of that writer. The success of "Peter the Great" is like a searchlight in the blackout which has concealed a great nation for twenty-five years. In the light of its beam we see, as in the grim glare of torches, what are the ideals that bring a gleam into the slanting eyes of the nation which carries and drags like heavy eastern furs, like prison chains, its Mongol and Slav heritage.

The Revolutionary

Alexey Tolstoy's head would look well on a great historical canvas by Matejko or Riepin. Ilya Ehrenburg's head would not match it very well. But if the bombs were to knock off one of the gargoyles which look down on Paris from the Notre Dame, it might well be replaced by Ehrenburg's sad, gaunt, pensive face.

Ehrenburg was one of the writers by whom I had been particularly shaken and impressed. The Catholic, traditional, sentimental world of my youth was torn in agony when I first read the blasphemous, rational sarcasms of "Julio Jurenito." It was a painful, revolting shock, but one returned to it, as a youth who once tasted dissipation will return, in spite of the disgust of the first experience. It was something like a brutal tank crashing its way into a mediaeval fortress full of romantic ivy grown walls, Gothic chapels, dark cellars, intricate heraldry and mouldy water in deep moats. If it had not been for one of Ehrenburg's books about Spain, written just after the fall of Alphonso XIII, I would never have gone to Spain when the civil war blazed up amidst its arid hills. And Spain was for me a great experience.

Ehrenburg passed through Poland several times in his life and he sometimes wrote about it. I had been under the impression that he was frankly hostile to our country, but after meeting him in Moscow I could revise this view to a certain extent. There are apparently in Poland some things which call up unexpected emotions in the heart of that old sceptic and cynic. The old Polish culture, with its western elements of French and Italian influence; the Polish political quixotry that drove the Poles to all the battlefields and barricades of the world; Polish women—these are the things that Ehrenburg likes in Poland.

I see his figure on the background of the Paris boulevards, of the thronged cafés of Montparnasse, or even Moscow. But the actual scene is different. Winter, a small railway station submerged by snow, wooden huts and the steppe—somewhere in the steppe the thousands of tents of one of our divisions. Sikorski, Cazalet, Vishinsky, foreign correspondents, Polish soldiers with frostbitten feet, in British battle dress, with Polish eagles on Russian caps. In a peasant sledge, wrapped in furs, Ehrenburg with his sensitive face, strange and alien to such surroundings. Ehrenburg, in a huge, heavy fur, in felt snow boots walked around, talked to soldiers and listened to the bitter words about Russia of the Polish soldiers of non-Polish origin. Ehrenburg sympathised with these people as Tolstoy, with a feeling for history alone, could never have done.

Contemplating one of those two great writers, I am compelled to think also of the other, for they bring each other out by contrast. These two portraits, like two beacons, throw a light on the tangled ways of Russia and Revolution over the steppes. But Tolstoy, although he

comes out of the past, is also a portent of what may happen in Russia in the near future, while Ehrenburg is rather a man of her recent past. Tolstoy is the Soviet tomorrow and Ehrenburg the yesterday of the Revolution. Tolstoy is Russia; Ehrenburg is the Revolution. Tolstoy is the soil; Ehrenburg the thought. Tolstoy returned willingly from Paris to Moscow; Ehrenburg was always glad to sneak out of Russia to Paris, to Europe. Tolstoy is today the most popular writer in Russia; Ehrenburg is still the Russian writer most widely read abroad. Tolstoy is deeply rooted in the historical past of his country, he is the descendant of boyars, he writes about the past; Ehrenburg is a Jew, a member of the section of Russian intelligentsia strongly mixed with Jewry. He avoids history. The one is linked with Russia by the Suvorovs and Kutuzovs; the other by Dostoievski and Yasnaya Polyana.

Tolstoy's interest in the October revolution is due only to the fact that it was Russian; Ehrenburg is interested in all revolutions: Spanish, Hungarian, the Parish Commune—any revolution. The Internationale is sacred for Tolstoy because it was sung by Soviet soldiers dying at Tzaritzin in 1919, at Perekop in 1921 and at Stalingrad; for Ehrenburg it is the song which sounded whenever blood streamed on the streets of capitals, wherever revolution sprang up in revenge. They both accept cruelty; no Soviet writer could fail to tolerate cruelty. But Tolstoy savours it; Ehrenburg recoils. Tolstoy is a man of the East, the sight of blood stirs in him the instincts of a beast of prey; Ehrenburg is an oversensitive intellectual, who declares that he is not afraid of blood, but actually dreads its sight.

Such endless contrasting may be a dull method of describing a personality, but the contrast seemed both striking and significant to me when I met these two men. When we were going from Moscow to Kuibyshev, in the course of the general evacuation, with President Kalinin, the Narkomindiel and the other embassies, Ehrenburg lost the manuscript of the third part of his "Fall of Paris." While Ehrenburg was mourning the misery of that distant city, Tolstoy was busy writing about the history of native Russia.

Later I explored Kuibyshev with Ilya Ehrenburg. It is one of the old provincial cities of Russia, something like a Soviet Lyons or Birmingham. Ehrenburg saw it for the first time; he had spent most of the last twenty years abroad. He looked with some amazement, but without great interest at the city on the Volga. I am sure he had looked otherwise at Rouen, Bruges or Cologne. Alexey Tolstoy, when I met him, was just returning from Gorki and was on his way to Tashkent. He talked much and with great gusto about Tashkent, which he knows well, and about the peoples of that corner of the Soviet Union. He never asked any questions about France, Britain or the West.

Ehrenburg was very fortunate to have spent so much of his time abroad, especially in recent years. If he had been in Russia, he would have inevitably associated with people of his own kind and would have had to share their fate at the hands of the G.P.U. The Revolution knows no mercy. Ehrenburg represented in Russian literature, if not the movement, then at least the spirit of the Left, of internationalism and of the Comintern—which was represented in politics by Trotzky and Tchicherin, to some

extent by Litvinov at Geneva. It was a very different spirit from that which inspired the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact. While Ehrenburg's revolutionary and critical studies are excellent, his books praising the glorious Soviet achievements are hopelessly dull. In the course of the Soviet evolution, which took Meyerhold off the Russian stage and won popularity for Tolstoy, Ehrenburg's star waned. At the time of the fall of Paris it was almost on the point of extinction. Then Ehrenburg returned to Moscow. His position was very precarious. But June 22nd, 1941 saved him.

Today Ehrenburg is again at the top, for even in literature there are coalition cabinets in time of war. The wind which fills the sails of Tolstoy's barque helps Ehrenburg too. But it does not carry him as far. It helps, for the war is fought against fascism, against the swastika and the lictors' fasces, for it stretches a hand to all the underground movements of Europe, which use sabotage, assassination and secret press. The Soviet standards are as red as they were at the time of the October revolution, the star on the Soviet soldiers' caps is also the same. But Ehrenburg does not feel at ease in the company of the Kutuzovs and Suvorovs, Pozarskis and Alexander Nevskis, whose ghosts hover today over the Red Army. That is a wind which blows him no good.

Ehrenburg looks everywhere in Russia for western influence. He discovered Italian elements in the Kremlin towers, but I confess that I could never trace them there. He always speaks with appreciation about the Wawel castle of Cracow, which is truly Italian, for it was built by architects of Milan, Florence and Naples, who carried their art further north than they ever did before. Alexey

Tolstoy certainly realises that the Kremlin is Asiatic and he enjoys it because of that. I sometimes felt sorry for that man with a delicate, sad, contemplative expression, who yearned for his Paris like so many intellectuals in the other capitals of the world. I think Ehrenburg is probably the only man to be suffering that pang in the huge area between the Volga and Vladivostok. And this makes him a European in exile. And here it makes him very much a figure of the past.

Page and Passionaria

The third of my Russian portraits is that of a woman. She would make a fine and interesting portrait by a good artist. Tall, lean and erect, with a finely chiselled face, her eyes are luminous, sometimes burning with anger or enthusiasm, sometimes soft with human kindness. There is something fierce in her eyebrows, in the movements of her head, in the concentration with which she listens and the force with which she speaks. Her hair is short, like that of the old suffragettes, greyish, and touseled like that of a young boy. Yes, Helene Felixovna Usijevich might sit for a very interesting portrait.

I might say that she one of the leading literary critics of Russia, perhaps the best, and Russia always had literary critics of the highest distinction. They may have helped Russian literature to become what it is. But that would be a very inadequate description of Helene Usijevich. I might say that she is the daughter of Felix Kohn, one of the most authentic old Bolsheviks, who died last year in Moscow and was buried with honours, after a long life as revolutionary and writer. His name has a perma-

nent place in the annals of the party and of the Revolution. I might also add that Helene Usijevich is one of those people now very rare in Russia, who took part in the revolutionary activity under Nicholas II, spent some time in his prisons, and then lived in Switzerland in a small group of revolutionary émigrés surrounding that great figure—Lenin. As a young girl she travelled, after the Tsar's downfall, through Germany and Sweden to the Finnish frontier, in the famous "sealed carriage" in which the general staff of the October revolution was sent to revolutionary St. Petersburg.

"I remember well how journalists surrounded our carriage in Sweden," says Helene Usijevich, "and asked questions in English, in German, in French, in Russian. But we only nodded and put fingers to our mouths. Nobody said a word. Lenin had forbidden us to speak. He only smiled."

She has an inexhaustible store of memories, of vivid, striking episodes, which she recalls with freshness and colour. Her sense of humour is very keen. She told us how, after coming to Moscow, she stayed with her husband at the house of his parents. Mr. and Mrs. Usijevich senior were typical respectable middle-class Russians. They read every day a liberal bourgeois daily, which was their Bible. One day they read in their paper the detailed story of how the young Usijevich couple received from the German General Staff a fantastic sum of money in roubles. . . .

What a scandal! "My poor father-in-law was completely overcome. For thirty years he had faithfully believed every word he read in the 'Birzevyje Viedomosti' and he thought his son quite crazy, but still an honest man. I saw him looking at me, at first with astonishment

and horror and then, as he gradually grew to know me better, with mixed sympathy and incredulity. Could this be the notorious Bolshevik woman? Finally, when my husband was not at home, he drew himself near to me in his armchair and asked: "Tell me—I won't repeat it—not even to my wife—you can tell me—how it was with those millions—did you take them from the Germans?" And I," says Helene Usijevich, "just laughed mischievously: 'Yes, father, we took them. But I don't know what happened to the money afterwards, perhaps I stuffed it into a sofa, or maybe I had a hole in my pocket—they're gone, the three millions. . . .'"

Then they both laughed and old Usijevich's confidence in the press has never been the same since that day.

Helene Usijevich was at the Smolny Institute, she was at the July attempt of a Bolshevik coup. She was with Lenin everywhere. She was not one of the principal actors of the great drama, but she was one of the chorus—and such people can see most and remember. They also are most typical. Helene Usijevich drinks a lot of good strong tea, she smokes many cigarettes and eats very little. There is in her face some revolutionary asceticism. She likes to talk, she is a splendid story-teller and a brilliant debater. She is the last of the thousands of women of the Russian intelligentsia who did so much to destroy old Russia. Endless night discussions in students' garrets in St. Petersburg or Moscow, amidst clouds of cigarette smoke, barricades and battles with the police in 1905, throwing of bombs at fat Tsarist general governors, women with only one passion—The Cause—that was the world of Helene Usijevich.

She is much less inclined to tell about her war adven-

tures at the time of the civil war. But I know a good deal about them. She was a political commissar at the front, she turned the slack soldiers of Kerensky into Red Army warriors, she was nearly captured by the Whites, then some Czechs saved her life—a story like the scenario of a revolutionary film, as good as the best that Pudovkin or Eisenstein ever made. Then the story breaks off just as it does in Soviet films, which are magnificent when they picture the first days of Soviet creation, but much weaker and rather bleak when they deal with the subsequent stages, collectivisation, the five year plans and the rest. She is a woman of the years of the Revolution.

No profound knowledge of Russian affairs is required to know that Helene Usijevich has more than once been within a step of making a prolonged study of prison conditions of the U.S.S.R. These things are quite common in this revolution. Besides, that bold, outspoken woman made many enemies in the literary world. The violent press campaign against her which broke out some time ago was very ominous. But then it was suddenly cut short. People whispered one word—Kremlin. Heads bowed again to the passing, slim, straight figure of Helene Usijevich. Her name appeared again on book covers and under literary articles. She went on speaking her mind. She established her own personal freedom of speech. The Revolution decided that it was strong enough to tolerate the frankness of one woman.

A few months after the occupation of Lwow the Soviet authorities decided that their initial policy was not particularly fortunate from the point of view of their own interests. The persecution of the Poles considered to be "gentlemen" resulted in an artificial growth of the

Ukrainian influence. There was a good reason to doubt the reliability of the Ukrainians from the Soviet point of view. When the Soviet authorities began to suspect the Ukrainians, they decided to revise their attitude towards the Poles. The deportations continued, but it was proposed to assist some cultural activities. Helene Usijevich, whose father had belonged to the Polish revolutionary movement before he joined the Russian one, came to Lwow in an undefined capacity, but her disregard of all authority impressed the provincial tyrants. She established contacts with Polish writers and saved some of them from penitentiary deportation to Siberia. She even founded a Polish literary periodical.

The local Soviet authorities, quick to grasp the trend of the day in Moscow, decided to rename one of the streets of Lwow in honour of Suvorov.

Helene Usijevich burst into the office. "What, you want to insult the national feelings of the Poles again? And it is a street crossing Kosciuszko street, too!"

The Soviet officials did not know that the Russian field marshal had been a successful adversary of the Polish fighter for independence, but they did not want to antagonize Lenin's menacing comrade, so they dropped their plan.

Helene Usijevich was often shocked in Lwow. She once saw in the street a priest carrying the Holy Sacrament. In the crowd, which knelt down in the street at the sight of the Sacrament, she noticed two Soviet officers, who were also kneeling, rather embarrassed.

"Aren't you ashamed of yourselves?" she scolded them. "Don't you know this is religious superstition?"

The officers were confused. "We knew it was something

religious, but our orders are not to offend the religious feelings of the population of the newly incorporated lands. . . .”

Helene Usijevich talks about her visit to Poland with affection, just as she does about the great days of the birth of the Revolution. She found in Lwow a cultured atmosphere and people who had not yet been forced to think in clichés. It was a world that reminded her of the long night discussions over a samovar of tea in students' rooms, before the Revolution. The revolutionary general Kosciuszko is nearer to her heart than Suvorov, who punished the armies of the French Revolution. She prefers Marx to Peter the Great. There are in her conversations long moments of silence. I then look at her and I read in her silent face more than she would ever tell me. I can see much in that woman. She is the symbol of a period, of a time of revolt, hope and desire. She is a human portrait of the 'seventeens and 'eighteens; she is the last of people who are now phantoms of the past, even more than the scion of boyars writing about new Russia.

Page of the last Empress of Russia

On Sunday afternoon, when snow was already melting and water dripped from rain pipes, one could see in the street of Kuibyshev a tall and personable man wearing a uniform which was that of a Soviet general, but carrying it with a dignity and grace, a pomp and circumstance that are altogether uncommon among Soviet officers. The huge grey fur hat with a general's red top looked like a guardsman's busby, not like a Cossack cap. In the cloakroom of the hotel, practically reserved for foreigners, the general

tossed off his greatcoat with a gesture which meant that he had long been in the habit of having someone to take it with a respectful bow and smile.

Soviet dignitaries are rather nervous when facing a waiter. They don't know what to do with the menu, what to order and how to order. Their embarrassment is rather attractive. But that Soviet general sat down in the Victorian lounge of the old Commercial Hotel of Samara like an old habitu   of the best restaurants of Paris. He studied the menu with benevolent earnestness, he consulted the waiter, he made a few appropriate remarks, he officiated. Old waiters blushed like a grandmother at the sight of the faded *carnet de bal* of the days of her youth.

In the summer, the Soviet general amazed the grey people of Kuibyshev even more. He sauntered along the main street on Sunday afternoons, even more magnificent than in the spring. His black boots were not full of creases, like those of other Soviet officers, but gleamed with a superb polish. His navy blue trousers were adorned with a beautiful broad red stripe. The dazzlingly white tunic with gold buttons, gold general's stars on the collar and gold braid on the sleeves contrasted well with the rest of the uniform. The general walked arm in arm with his wife, a handsome, plump woman in an elegant though rather provincial dress; in his other hand he carried a sword. Everybody knew him well, but people always looked round, as though they had seen an apparition from another world.

The uniform did not look quite Soviet to me.

"What sort of uniform does General Ignatiev really wear?" I asked two Soviet officers who were looking at the

senior general with an expression of mixed admiration, curiosity and indulgence.

"Oh, it's very complicated," they said. "First of all the boots must be foreign. No such boots are made in Russia. The trousers are really part of a Soviet general's uniform, but they belong to the gala dress. The tunic is of a type worn by our army in the summer in the southern Asiatic countries of the Union. A kind of colonial uniform. It is not usual to carry on it all the gold braid of a general. . . ."

Then they laughed goodnaturedly. "Don't forget that General Ignatiev started his career in the Horse Guards and he always likes a bright uniform. He tries to do what he can with our Soviet drab and he manages quite nicely."

And the Soviet officers, Ignatiev's juniors by two ranks, one epoch, several social classes and twenty-five years, looked at the ex-Guards officer as they would have looked at a museum exhibit, rather as a tank driver would look at a Waterloo grenadier.

General Count Ignatiev is not unknown outside Russia. He used to travel a good deal and now he is busy writing volume after volume of his memoirs: "Fifty Years in Uniform." He has already carried his narrative as far as the Russo-Japanese war, during which he served on Kuropatkin's staff in Manchuria. Much has changed during those fifty years and the uniform worn by Ignatiev has not always been the same. He started in the uniform of the corps of Pages of St. Petersburg; then he wore that of a cadet, which he changed for the uniform of the Horse Guard and later that of another crack regiment 9 the Preobrajenski, I think, but I am not learned in the mili-

tary history of old Russia. Then it was the uniform of a Russian colonel, worn by the military attaché of the Imperial Russian Embassy in Paris. And then the uniform of a Soviet general. Malicious people in Moscow were said to be sometimes wondering what will be the last uniform of Count Ignatiev.

He is a brilliant causeur, speaking beautiful literary Russian. The new men brought to the top by the revolution have all kinds of local accents and they introduce into common speech many popular expressions, the Russian equivalent of Cockney.

His French is as good as his Russian and he speaks several other languages fluently. His conversation is perhaps lacking in the dynamism of Tolstoy, the subtle irony of Ehrenburg, the peculiar charm and intensity of Helene Usijeich. He is a drawing room sporting and military causeur. A typical officer of the Horse Guard. He has plenty of stories, mostly very spicy, always amusing and well told. No man could have known more people in one lifetime—St. Petersburg, Paris, the Far East.

The first volumes of General Ignatiev's memoirs are very much like his conversation. It is the life of a son of a family of soldiers and civil servants, holding since several generations important positions in the Army, in the Administration and at the Court. Ignatiev himself, as a young page, had carried the train of Empress Alix at her coronation in Moscow in 1896. The few pages which he devoted to the last Tsaritzza contain the warmest words he had put in his memoirs. He writes with some affection about the peasants he had known in his childhood; with enthusiasm about regimental traditions and officers' cele-

brations; with restraint about his family; but he does not give his feelings to anyone. It seems to be one of the more attractive features of that colourful but not always particularly attractive figure.

Ignatiev has always had a splendid *saillie d'esprit*. During the first world war he was military attaché at the Imperial Embassy in Paris. The Tsar eventually lost the throne, governments changed and after a while Ignatiev was left alone in charge of an Embassy without a master. He managed it as he liked, refusing admittance to monarchists, democrats and all others. Complaints were made to Clemenceau. The Tiger asked Ignatiev to call and hauled him over the coals: To whom are you really responsible? To whom do you propose to make a report of your activities?

Ignatiev calmly replied: "Perhaps to the peasants of my native Tver province."

Ignatiev really loved the life of a cavalry subaltern, between the drawing rooms of St. Petersburg and the riding schools of regiments of the guard. Now and then he loudly condemns that decadent world, but one feels that he does so only because he is expected to do it. His readers also turn revolutionary moralists for a moment, but they also do it merely from a sense of duty, gobbling breathlessly the entrancing tale of a fantastic lost world. The philosophical and social observations of Ignatiev seem incongruous in his story of a guards officer. But every anecdote, every account of a ball, a parade, a reception or diplomatic quid pro quo rings genuine, vivid and true.

"We, Marxists," says Ignatiev to Helene Usijevich, quite earnestly. She laughs. What a Marxist!

There are many insincere passages in his story. Ignatiev relates that his diplomatic and military career gave him a large number of high decorations of many countries. "Now my wife hangs them on the Christmas tree," he writes. I am sure that the general would love to pin them all on his Soviet uniform and that he aspires to the day when he will be able to do so.

The rise of the Ignatiev family was started by our general's grandfather. He was a young officer in one of the St. Petersburg regiments at the time when, after the death of Alexander I, a group of aristocratic but liberal officers wanted to revolt and compel the Tsar to grant a Constitution. Ignatiev was one of the most active conspirators. He took part in the secret meeting on the eve of the day on which the coup was to be made. On the day itself he did take his detachment of troops from the barracks, led it at dawn to the Winter Palace and . . . offered his services to the Tsar. A few hours later Ignatiev's friends were all in prison, which they left only to go to the scaffold or to Siberia. Their fellow-conspirator became aide-de-camp and ended his life as minister, senator and count.

Ignatiev the grandson says that his grandfather's sudden change of mind was due to his mother's pleading. That may be so, but as we look at the ex-page of the Tsaritzza in the uniform of a Soviet general, we cannot help feeling that the Ignatiev family has some skill in changing trains at the right time.

Tolstoy sought in Soviet Russia the old Russia; he wanted to look upon Stalin as Peter the Great; he saw in Timoshenko and Voroshilov new Suvorovs and Alex-

ander Nevskis. Ignatiev looked in the new Russia for much smaller things. He wanted to find again the atmosphere of regimental feasts and officers' banquets in which he thrived. Now, when "guards divisions" are formed in the Soviet army, when new decorations are established and the Soviet uniform strays from its revolutionary simplicity, Count Ignatiev's heart warms with joy, just as Alexey Tolsoy's heart does whenever he sees a gleam of greatness in the history of Russia written in his time. Ignatiev is much more superficial and practical. The court career of his ancestors gave him a suppleness which he developed during his own diplomatic career. He survived, like the old waiters, who enjoy serving him, for he reminds them of old times.

Helene Usijevich is on the best of terms with him. She is the editor of his memoirs—in Soviet Russia every book has an editor as well as an author—and the old Don Juan has won the heart of the woman revolutionary. She is under his spell. I am sure that, if he had to, he would leave her with even greater ease than his grandfather abandoned the Decabrists, or than he himself deserted the Empress whose train he had carried in church, amidst singing choirs and clouds of incense.

"You don't like Ignatiev?" asked Helene Usijevich indignantly.

I smiled. What could I say? I knew well that all we had loathed in the people of Imperial Russia had remained intact in Ignatiev, changing much less than his successive uniforms. I know that he is not the only one of his kind. He is only the most brilliantly coloured specimen of the class.

I therefore replied: "You know, I must confess that as a man and as a Pole I much prefer old Bolsheviks to new converts from the Old Times."

I wondered for a moment at the bond of sympathy which obviously existed between these two people, so different from each other. Twenty years ago the same Madame Usijevich would have condemned the same Count Ignatiev to death without turning a hair. Thousands of such Ignatievs met their end at the hands of thousands of Usijeviches. It is natural enough that the page of the Empress is anxious to have a political alibi in the person of an old-Bolshevik friend, but what about her? Is it merely the work of the old technique perfected in St. Petersburg and Paris? No, it is more than that. The old enemy is, after all, a man of the same epoch, almost a contemporary of her youth. And the world of Helene Usijevich has vanished and perished, in spite of appearances, more completely than the world of the Imperial Courtier. There always comes a time when everything that recalls our youth, even if it is hostile, is closer to us than the surrounding strange new world. That is probably the psychological link between Count Ignatiev, officer of the Imperial Guard, and comrade Usijevich, a woman of the revolution, who came to Russia in Lenin's sealed carriage.

POSTSCRIPT

Why, the reader may ask, did you leave your journalist's story to describe four people chosen at random, people who do not play an important part in current events?

My explanation is this. We sometimes wonder what

future may arise out of the smoke of war and the mist of uncertainty. When nothing else avails, one returns to the old methods of cheiromancy, the art of reading the future from a hand. It seems to me that these four lives are lines on the mysterious hand of Russia. They can tell us not only four life stories, but also much more of the past and the future of the country.

14. *Why They Cannot Win*

EVERY day, at six o'clock, when darkness falls over Kuibyshev under deep, unswept snow, I tune in to several German stations. Through the icy winter night I hear first of all strong Russian marches, just like those sung by the Red Army, then the melodious Ukrainian ballads which that unhappy nation has been singing for centuries, or the dreamy, childish songs of the White Ruthenians. Afterwards there is a booming Russian voice, a Ukrainian woman announcer and various White Ruthenian speakers. The eastern stations of the Reich begin their nightly bombardment and a dozen Slav Haw-Haws start working hard for their bread and butter. It is difficult to find out which of these stations are broadcasting for Russia and which serve the occupied territories. There are new transmitters and new wave lengths almost every day. Wireless can lie as well as photography. The German stations broadcasting in the languages of the Soviet Union speak into the Soviet wave lengths, imitating the Soviet programs and using their own terminology of communism.

The technique of the German propagandists is faultless. Their announcers speak excellent Russian. They even speak it rather too well. They speak the language of the old Russian intelligentsia, the language spoken

today by the Soviet General Ignatiev and the Polish General Anders who was educated in pre-1914 Russia. The average Russian of today does not speak it that way. The Revolution adulterated the language of the educated class by the admixture of various dialects and slangs, adding many new words, like "kolkhoz," "Chlebezagotovka," "Stakhanovietz" and hundreds of others. The Ukrainian speakers of the German radio—mostly women—speak Ukrainian with a Polish accent, typical of the speech of the educated Ukrainians of Lwow and quite different from the pronunciation of the Ukraine proper, the Dnieper country. I do not know the White Ruthenian language sufficiently well to locate the accent of the Minsk quislings. The contents of their speeches make it clear, however, that the Germans did not win over any great minds.

The word immortalised by Cambronne is used daily by that station to describe the Soviet system. It is frequently repeated even by the women announcers, but it does not seem to sound quite as well as it did on the lips of Napoleon's general on the field of Waterloo. The German stations carry on their bombardment for several hours; communiqués from the front, news from the occupied territories, slogans and promises. After some hours the barrage is lifted and the stations return to their normal German programs, like bombers returning to their bases after they have unloaded all their bombs.

The more I listen to the broadcasts with which the Third Reich hopes to shatter Soviet morale, the more I am convinced that Germany cannot win the war against Russia. It is perhaps the first time that I formed this conviction. I knew that tanks would pass over Russian

mud; I knew that Germany has at its service the entire armament industry of Europe, while Russia lost some of its principal industrial districts. After the loss of the Ukraine and parts of Central Russia, the shortage of food was bound to have a terrible effect on the Russian ability to resist. Would there be a shortage of oil as well? It seemed quite probable that there would. But Russia is too great a country to be conquered by armed might alone, to be subdued with bombers, tanks and guns. Even the Tsars were not brought down by the German military victories, but by the internal revolutionary movement started in Petersburg, among the hundred thousand workmen of that city. Russia can be defeated only with the help of the high explosive which has brought down so many empires, the infiltration among the masses of indifference and reluctance to fight. Napoleon could destroy the Holy Roman Empire because his armies carried with them the germ of the revolution. He could not hold Egypt or Spain precisely because they were countries which remained insensitive to the revolutionary appeal.

During the twenty years of the existence of Soviet Russia there have been many plans of intervention in that country; all of them took account of the psychological factor. Some people wanted to back Great Russian patriotism against the revolution; others meant to champion religion against atheism; others still planned a great revolt against Moscow of all the subject nations—the Ukraine, White Ruthenia, the Caucasian tribes, even the Don Cossacks. I am not concerned at present with the question whether any of these plans was practical. I am not speaking of the time when the nonarchist forces were still strong enough for a restoration and when a national

rising was the only means of breaking up the Russian giant. But it is significant that so far all the enemies of Soviet Russia realised that it could not be defeated by arms alone and Hitler was the first to attack Russia without any psychological weapons.

The harangues in all the languages of the Soviet Union, with which the German stations are humming day after day, lay stress on hate of Bolshevism. No doubt there are places where such declarations may meet with some response. But they are not places of any great importance. I do not know to what extent the idea of a monarchist restoration might appeal to the Russians—but the Germans do not suggest it at all. I do not know what hopes might be aroused in Kiev by the promise of an independent Ukrainian State—but the Germans never made any such promise. I do not know what view the people of Minsk would take of the prospect of becoming the citizens of a country like Latvia or Estonia—but they are given no chance to react, because the announcers of the German radio of Minsk never hint at any such possibility. They prefer to treat their listeners to Cambronnian invective. It is true that the Germans re-opened the orthodox church of Smolensk and returned many other churches to their former use. But even those Russian peasants who buy crosses do not particularly like the clergy. The religious feeling in Russia is not dead, but it is not necessarily connected with the former established church.

It had been commonly believed in Europe for many years that the Ukrainian, White Ruthenian and Russian peasants would revolt against the Soviet regime if an intervention army promised them the distribution of land

from the kolkhozes. It was claimed that the urge to own land was immensely strong—and that is quite true. But the Germans have done nothing to satisfy that urge. The Soviet economic system has remained unaltered under the German occupation. The Germans respect and maintain the administrative system of a communist State just as they maintained those of capitalist States. They do not care whether the land is owned by rich landlords, by farmers or by kolkhozes, provided that Germany gets a big share of the crop. The Germans would no doubt tolerate cannibalism, anarchy, theocracy or utopian communism—with one reservation—that the countries practising these particular customs pay a large contribution to Germany. There is nothing revolutionary or genuinely constructive in the vast empire stretching east from the Pyrenees. There is no ideal capable of attracting loyalty—unless it be the idea of serving the master race.

It is true that the Russians have no means of listening to the German broadcasts, because the population is equipped with loudspeakers instead of receivers. They can be turned on or off, but there is no choice of program. The programs are selected by the central listening station of the districts, to which all the loudspeakers are connected by wires. The number of genuine receivers, capable of receiving foreign broadcasts, is negligible and could not have increased during the war. But important news invariably penetrates everywhere, even without any visible means of dissemination. News has always reached prisoners even in the most closely guarded gaols. If Hitler had said: "Return to your homes, the land which you are tilling is your own, it no longer belongs to the kolkhozes," such a gesture would have certainly made a

strong impression. If he had solemnly proclaimed in Kiev the establishment of an independent Ukraine, he would have certainly met with some response.

But the population of the occupied parts of Russia and of those which are directly menaced by the invaders knows perfectly well that Hitler has promised nothing and does nothing. Even if there are some Ukrainian military formations in Ukraine, their main task is to confiscate the grain of the Ukrainian peasants; if there are any Ukrainian divisions, their purpose is the same as that of the Rumanian, Hungarian or Slovak ones—to provide cannon fodder and save German lives. Those who hated the kolkhozes have not seen their abolition, but merely the establishment of a German control in that unpopular institution. Those who loathed the NKWD which deals ruthlessly with grumblers, have good reason to hate even more the Gestapo, which repeated in Russia its mass slaughters of Poland and Yugoslavia.

It is obvious why Hitler chose this method of conduct. He does not have the slightest interest in the constitutional, social or religious problems of the occupied countries. He simply wants to have the land, with as few Russians, Ukrainians, White Ruthenians or Poles as possible. The ultimate aim is German colonisation. In the meantime the native population is expected to provide coolie labour. The land may be used for the resettlement of the Czechs; maybe of the Poles. Hitler might consider transferring the whole Hungarian nation to the east, for the fertile Danubian lands, close to Germany, would be a desirable acquisition. At any rate the present population of the occupied provinces of Russia is not taken into account at all. Why should Hitler go to the trouble

of rebuilding the Romanov Empire, revive Cossack tradition in Kiev, or Tartar ambitions in Crimea? It has been already rumoured that Crimea was earmarked as a new Italian possession—some price had to be paid for the blood of the Italian divisions on the Eastern front.

Hitler, who had few scruples in dealing with Vichy France, is not likely to show more consideration to Russia. The German broadcasts in the languages of the Soviet Union speak mainly about the strength of the German army, about the defeats of the Russians and their allies and about the numerous requirements of the occupation authorities in Russia. It also gives much prominence to reports of the punishment meted out to all those who resisted the Germans or disobeyed their orders. Sometimes it goes even further. The Germans enumerate in their Ukrainian or Russian broadcasts, with unconcealed delight, the quantities of Ukrainian wheat, White Ruthenian timber, or Russian livestock, which they have so far sent to Germany. No doubt such statistics may be pleasant and alluring for a listener in Dresden or Wiesbaden, but they are not likely to arouse pro-German enthusiasm among the nations concerned. Sheep would probably not enjoy a broadcast about the profits made on wool and mutton. The statement that the Ukraine gave more grain to Hitler in 1941 than to Wilhelm II in 1918, whether true or not, is not likely to gratify the people of Kiev, especially if they happen to be hungry. And yet broadcasts of that type are very numerous.

The insistence of the German propaganda on anti-Semitism is another error. The time when the story about the "Jewish rulers of the Russian people" could have gained credence is long past. Many things have changed

in Russia in a quarter of a century—probably more than in any other country in the world. Trotzky has left the Kremlin a long time ago and does not seem to be lovingly remembered there. Kaganovich is gradually losing favour. The Revolution scattered throughout the huge territory of the Union, with its 160 million inhabitants, the few million Jews formerly concentrated in the western part of the country. Native Russians predominate today in the government of the Union, though some credence might possibly be given to an allegation to the effect that Russia is ruled by Georgians—Stalin, Beria, Mikoyan. . . .

A book recently published in Russia shows some of Hitler's blunders in the light of history. It is the work of the Russian historian, a specialist of the Napoleonic period, Professor Eugene Tarle. Marxism may not be the best economic doctrine, at any rate it does not seem to be a particularly effective formula for human happiness, but there is something to be said for its method of historical analysis. Professor Tarle has searched the archives well and discovered much that was striking. He also knew how to sift his evidence. He has a profound grasp of sociology and economic motives of conduct. This Russian historian declares that Napoleon had opportunities for stirring up revolt among the peasants and arousing them against the landlords, for the destruction of the feudal system of Russia. Tarle quotes interesting evidence to prove that the White Ruthenian peasants were at first inclined to welcome the French troops as liberators, that many serfs had openly revolted against the landlords in the summer of 1812 and that the prospect of revolution was so alarming that many Russian aristocrats, including the Dowager Queen and the Crown Prince, were in favour

of peace on any terms. But Napoleon did not want to start a popular revolt; he had always disliked the rabble. He underestimated the forces of the Russian people just as he had those of the Spaniards. He treated his expedition as a purely military undertaking. He failed to give full satisfaction to the Poles, who at the time were still extremely influential in Lithuania and White Ruthenia. He did not obtain the support of the Russian peasantry, nor that of the Moscow merchants, who were then a new and rising class, willing to accept patronage. In fact he did not even try to secure anyone's collaboration. The Russian historian very candidly lays bare these errors of Napoleon, which cost him his Empire. He describes minutely the evolution which took place in Russia in 1812; the war against France was at first universally unpopular, but every village burnt down by the French, every looted town, contributed to a change of mind, until the whole nation was roused against the invader.

When I read in the Soviet press lengthy reports about the events of recent days, I sometimes wonder whether the Russian historian had deliberately tried to make history topical, or whether the Russian journalists endeavour to make topical events fit the pattern of history. The German radio croaks in Russian, Ukrainian and White Ruthenian; the pages of history books whisper the same story and the long dispatches in the "Izvestia" and "Pravda" seem a hundred years old. History repeats its lesson once again, for the benefit of those who did not realise that great armies alone are not enough to build great empires. The builders of empires possessed something which Napoleon lacked in Egypt, in Spain and in Russia. Hitler has never had it anywhere.

15. The Steppes on the March

I SPENT the two months dividing the winter from the summer in my bed, ill with typhus. It was a long and exhausting illness, with an even longer convalescence. I had occasion to make the acquaintance of an important aspect of Russian life—epidemic disease. The losses sustained by Russia as a result of epidemics are generally underestimated in the West, but I was informed that they were enormous. The Asiatic South to which General Anders' army had moved before leaving Russia was particularly strongly affected. The Poles, who had spent two years in prisons and in hard labour camps in the North, were particularly susceptible and so were the people transferred from the Ukraine in the course of the war with Germany. Only the natives, Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Tadjiks, looked on with a smile of indifference at the death of thousands of newcomers. The disease originating from their own country seldom attacked them. The same thing happened in the far North, where the native Zyrians or Mordvins seemed immune to the diseases which decimated the prisoners in the labour camps.

During the long days of my convalescence Kuibyshev was teeming with men of various races about which most Europeans have never even heard. Perhaps they were the soldiers of the armies which Voroshilov and Budienny

were supposed to have been organising at the rear since autumn. When that plan was announced, we looked upon it as a mild form of dismissal for the two Heroes of the Union. The star of Timoshenko was still shining with full strength and that of the defender of Moscow, Zhukov, was rising. But the information about the new armies formed in the rear proved correct and now they began to flow towards the front, like the Volga when it broke its ice in the spring. Kuibyshev was obviously one of the intermediate depots. One saw in the streets of Kuibyshev crowds of pure Mongols, to whom the squalid and old fashioned provincial town of the Volga seemed as magnificent as the capital of the British Empire does to the natives of Nigeria or Ceylon. They were members of tribes with names as mysterious as their faces. Have you ever heard about Chantes, Evenkomims, Upravlentans, Nentans, Unanges and Etels? The Revolution changed not only the names of many towns, but also those of nations. It generally tried to return to the original names of various tribes, suppressing those given to them by their neighbours. There were many errors and misunderstandings. For instance in Poland the Soviet authorities looked upon the use of the word "zyd" for Jews as a symptom of anti-Semitism. They enforced the use of the Russian word "yevrei"; and then they were surprised to see that the Jews themselves protested most vehemently against the change. In Russia the word "zyd" is considered insulting, while "yevrei," originating not from the European "Jude," but from the Greco-Latin "Hebrew," had no such meaning. By some linguistic accident, however, that very word has acquired a distinctly offensive meaning in the Polish language, for it was used to de-

scribe the eastern, Russian Jew, who was never very popular in Europe and was known in Germany as the "Ost-judge." The same thing happened in Asia and the names of Samoyeds, Chukche and Syrts have disappeared while other new or perhaps very old names have been substituted.

Kuibyshev became more Asiatic than ever and the Victorian villas, the sad remnants of old Samara, looked rather like the relics of a dead civilisation submerged by a tidal wave and only visible on calm days, when their outline shows through the green water, like a shadow. One felt the invasion of something utterly alien and different. The words Kazackstan, Komi—that northern country of penitentiary camps—or Mordwa brought a shudder to those who had spent two years of grim captivity there. It was quite natural. They had been transported into the deepest Asia. They lived in countries which, four years earlier, would have been more inaccessible to them, or any other European, than the most remote parts of Thibet or Malaya. There was nothing like it anywhere else. In other Asiatic countries white men lived their own lives, but were not forced to accept a way of life which had nothing in common with their own. One does not have to be a racial fanatic or a feudalist to dislike the idea of having to live the life of the tribes of lake Baikal or the salt marshes of Aral. Every man is attached to the tradition of his own civilisation, his own land and his own people. The Poles are attached to theirs not less than the nations of western Europe. Poles have lived in the provinces of Lwow and Wilno for many centuries and they cannot enjoy forced residence in the steppes of central Asia, amidst their savage inhabitants.

These short, sturdy men with yellow faces, slanting eyes and a silent, secretive manner are probably excellent soldiers. There are also some of them among the officers, but not very many. The majority of the officers are Great Russians, but there are not many Ukrainians with commissioned rank, though the Caucasians are well represented. There is a fairly large percentage of Jews. They are understood to be good soldiers and my experience in the Polish army does not disprove that view. Besides, it seems that the Jewish minority in Russia is being gradually absorbed. I believe that the attempts to organise Jewish colonies in Birobidjan and elsewhere were not successful. But the Jews have mixed to a great extent with the Great Russian, Ukrainian and White Ruthenian mass. Assimilation was assisted by the fact that the percentage of Jewish population in Russia was not high. The Jews are obviously merging into the main core of what is called here the Soviet nation. The Asiatic peoples of the north and south have not yet mixed with the European Russians. They are a body apart.

The spring was getting warmer and fuller every day. The regiments passing through Kuibyshev were new and more Eastern every day. When one saw them in the streets, at the station, always commanded by officers of an entirely different racial type, or washing their linen in the Volga, one had the impression that a new power had entered the war. It was no longer Russia. When they bathed in the river, they no longer wore their Soviet uniforms. They were quite naked. I have never seen such a huge mass of naked men as those Mongols wading in the muddy Volga. They stirred up the sand and clay at the bottom, and the water turned yellow. They were not

beautiful. Their bodies were yellow, clumsy though strong, with long arms, rather ape-like. Their appearance in Kuibyshev was not only strange, but alarming. What if they go on. What if they advance far west. They are the Golden Horde and the people of Genghis Khan, awakened by this war and launched upon the world again. They have rifles instead of spears, tommy guns instead of bows and arrows, light greenish tanks instead of Tartar ponies. Looking at the crowd of yellow, slant-eyed men bathing in the river, I could not help thinking that the soldiers of Batu-Khan and Tamerlane and all the other Mongolian conquerors of the past must have looked exactly like these soldiers, perhaps even at that very spot, bathing in the Volga on their way to Paris, Rome and Germany. It is true that they failed and that they only trampled under the hooves of their horses Hungary and Poland. But I happen to have some interest in the fate of at least one of those two countries.

16. To Stalingrad by the Volga

THE "Paryskaya Komuna" probably did not always bear the name of the communist experiment which preceded the Soviet venture. It was built in Russia in 1913, as a luxury Volga steamer. Now it has been re-fitted and re-decorated. The Volga used to be and, to some extent, is even today a popular route for inland pleasure cruises. A voyage from Nizhni Novgorod to Astrakhan took several weeks and the slow movement of the paddle-steamer was a real relaxation. The banks of the river are picturesque, at first wooded, then hilly and reminiscent of the Danube in Hungary, finally spreading in the boundless steppe. Ambassador Kot selected this means of transport after terminating his mission in Russia, for his heart does not stand air travel well.

The river boat moves slowly; there is plenty of rest and a gradual change of climate. River travel was also considered advisable for me, in view of the typhus which I had recently suffered. The Volga boat pier in Kuibyshev was full of the friends who came to see us off. There were many Poles and diplomats of various nations. The paddle boat was clean and comfortable, but it unfortunately had no restaurant or dining room. We had to cook our own food during the five days' journey to Astrakhan. We treated it as a kind of picnic.

Kuibyshev, with its houses on the high river bank, with the grain elevator and the factories built under the Five Year Plan, was soon out of view. We were surrounded by a vast green forest, thick and impenetrable, just like the forest which greeted us when we came to Russia, nearly a year ago. We came through the north and we were leaving through the south, but there did not seem to be much difference. The evening was warm, the Volga gleamed with the reddish hue of iron, the vast country seemed deserted and calm. Very few passengers lounged on the first class deck; some Soviet officers and a scholarly gentleman who eventually proved to be a Russian admiral evacuated from Leningrad. One of the officers started a conversation. He had seen our departure from Kuibyshev and he gathered that we were Poles. "I should like to talk with you about various problems," he said. We made an appointment for the next day, as I knew that a talk about "various problems" could never take less than two hours.

The landscape which greeted us on the following morning was identical with that of the preceding evening. It is a typical feature of Russian scenery, whether seen from a train or a boat, that it takes at least a thousand miles of travel to see the slightest change or variety. Monotony is the natural consequence of the size of Russia. When I went up, the officer was already on the deck. He opened the conversation with a declaration of absolute faith in the wisdom of Stalin, the perfection of the Soviet system and a few other dogmas laid down by the Party "general line." This kind of opening is used as an insurance against possible future allegations concerning the political orthodoxy of one's conversation. Then he asked several questions, quivering with curiosity, like patrols sent out to

reconnoitre after an artillery preparation. One of the first questions proved quite a stumbling block.

"Where are you going now?"

"To London," I answered.

This reply was received with incredulity and utter amazement.

"To London? What London?"

"The capital of Britain, of course."

There was a brief silence and then he asked, with bated breath:

"Then you have a foreign passport?"

There was infinite astonishment in that question. So might one ask a fellow passenger on a cross-channel steamer: "Then you carry the Crown Jewels in your pocket?"

"Of course I have one."

"Who gave it to you?"

"My government, as always."

"What government? Polish?"

"Naturally. Don't you know that there is a Polish Government in London?"

The officer was completely nonplussed.

"I know, I know. General Sikorski . . . And that government of yours in London issues passports? What do the British say to that?"

"The British? Nothing at all."

Then it all dawned on me. During the period of "neutrality" the Russian propaganda was so busy presenting the Allied governments in London as complete puppets that the public accepted the view without reservation. The officer had new doubts and he asked:

"But you are now going only to England?"

I was getting a bit tired of not being understood or believed.

"Yes, I am," I replied.

"Could you go to Switzerland?"

It was my turn to be flabbergasted. What about Switzerland?

"Or perhaps," he added, "to Sweden or Portugal?"

I saw his point. He obviously thought that the Poles were allowed at best to go from one Allied country to another, but that they would never get a chance of bolting to the neutrals. The notion of freedom of movement is difficult to grasp for those who had never known it.

The conversation stumbled. The important questions which the officer had wanted to discuss were conveniently forgotten. He took his leave, politely, but carefully. It is safer to have nothing to do with people going abroad. . . .

The day was growing warmer, distinctly southern. The Volga flows slowly, calm and powerful. The river has not been regulated at all and there are plenty of side channels, backwaters and shallows. We sometimes passed small jetties, mostly built on old boats moored to the banks. The peasants we saw there were taciturn and watchful. We passed again and again large flat-bottomed barges, towed up-stream by steam tugs. The Volga returns in the spring to its part as the main trade route of central Russia.

Most of the barges were tankers. The whole output of the oil wells of Baku and Grozny was being shipped towards the upper Volga, to reinforce the reserves of Nizhni Novgorod, Svierdlovsk beyond the Urals and Mos-

cow itself. The long trains of barges provided a welcome relief of movement in the lifeless monotony of the surrounding country.

A SHORT CALL AT SARATOV

Many new passengers joined our boat. They were all Soviet officers, mostly returning to the front after recovering from their wounds. They saw Professor Kot on the deck and asked him to tell them something about Poland. As the Professor's Russian is not very fluent, he turned them over to me. I tried to explain a few important facts; it has always been held in Russia that Poland would be the vanguard of any foreign intervention against Soviet Russia. This belief was entirely unfounded. Today all the western neighbours of Russia, from Finland to Rumania, including the Hungarians, Slovaks and God knows who else, are fighting the Soviet Union. Poland is the only one of the neighbouring nations which, far from fighting Russia, is even organising an army, formed of prisoners released after two years from Soviet gaols, to fight the common enemy. I think these facts speak for themselves. No comment is needed to make them carry their message. My audience was composed of men who conformed to the usual type of Soviet officer, with which I had become familiar. They are simple, perhaps even primitive men, but they can think logically and they understand their task. Now they also realise to what extent the country depends and relies on them. Every victory will add to their consciousness of indispensability.

We sighted Stalingrad at 5 P.M. The town on the high bank of the river on the right hand side is visible from a

distance. There were some fine buildings and some old churches. We went to see the city, which is built on a hill gently sloping westwards. It was there, in Tsaritsin, that the armies commanded by Stalin and Voroshilov had stemmed the advance of the White forces. During the Five Year Plan several important arsenals were built in the town, which was renamed Stalingrad. All the streets close to the Volga seemed to be full of hospitals. All the houses, offices and even shops had been converted to hospitals. I saw corner buildings reinforced with concrete, both outside and inside, to make blockhouses. There were barricades everywhere, solid structures of stone and masonry, like those I had seen in Moscow. The streets were full of soldiers, there were hardly any civilians about, and large numbers of aeroplanes roared overhead. The proximity of the front made itself felt very tangibly, although the Germans were still nearly two hundred miles away. We were repeatedly asked for our passes and we decided that it would be better to return on board.

After Stalingrad the Volga turns eastward, that is, away from the front and the Germans. The enemy armoured formations had at that time already crossed the Don in some places and were pressing forward steadily. There were no more forests or hills on the banks of the Volga. The flat, endless steppe was all that could be seen, as far as the horizon. It was getting warmer and the climate was becoming almost tropical. The utter monotony of the river scene was relieved by the long caravans of barges with oil trudging slowly up the sluggish stream. The river itself had not changed since the beginning of history. The reddish clay of the banks, washed by one of the greatest rivers of the world, crumbles into the water

as it has always done. The sun sets low, red and fierce, as it has always done on the steppe. Shepherds in sheep-skin caps, worn in spite of the heat, water their horses and gaze at our boat just as they had done hundreds of years ago, when strangers sailed down the Volga. Nothing has changed.

In the evening we saw the distant lights of a port and a town. The banks had flattened out so thoroughly that everything seemed to emerge from the river reeds. Here was another place where the age-long slumber of the land had been disturbed by a trace of human activity. In it as everywhere else throughout the country we saw the white walls and green domes of orthodox churches. They heralded the approach to Astrakhan, once a rich port, famous for its furs and for its caviare, now a decadent town living on its former wealth, like a man wearing out his suits of better days. A miserable hotel, some acacia trees in the squares, a few revolutionary monuments and the scarlet patches of posters. But there was something else too.

In the middle of the town, surrounding some churches, there was a citadel with indented walls and pointed towers. It was the Kremlin of Astrakhan. But it was not like the Kremlins which we had seen from the air in northern Russia. Astrakhan did not have the tradition of Novgorod, Vologda or Tver, those poor but authentic cousins of Moscow. It was a new imperial acquisition, taken from the Tartar Golden Horde. But an imitation of the Moscow Kremlin was erected there, as a symbol of unity; a bad, slavish imitation, like the Gothic castles of the XIXth century. But how significant!

On the following day we were already in the delta of the Volga. It looked like an immense meadow, crossed by many channels. Its green was the fresh colour of English lawns, rare in the rest of Russia. The delta gradually merges with the Caspian sea. The flat tanker barges were there, swarming into the mouth of the Volga, like big flies crawling into a bottle. It was a perfectly flat world, as flat as the sea ahead of us. Astrakhan with its Kremlin and churches sank behind the straight horizon and the blue sea opened before us.

IN THE CASPIAN

It was a cruise far surpassing anything provided by Cook's. The region of the Caspian is surely among the least known and least visited on earth. As science was overcoming one by one the obstacles of distance, climate and other natural barriers, men have been busy erecting political barriers more impenetrable than the natural ones. Russia invited tourists to Moscow and not far beyond it. The Asiatic part of Russia became completely inaccessible. It is bordered on one side by the boundless deserts of Mongolia and Thibet, and on the other by some of the richest oilfields in the world. The Russians have not forgotten the attempts which have been made to rob them of their oil. They remembered that "the world is ruled by those who control oil" and they were very careful not to allow anywhere near their precious oilfields any foreign visitors, whether coming in tanks or in charabancs. The Caspian seems to be a reduced sized replica of the Mediterranean. The Caucasus; Turkestan; the Volga

steppes; Iran—these are the Italy, Spain, Libya and Palestine of the second Mediterranean—almost equal in variety to the first.

It is often said that the sea is a bond between countries, not a barrier, and that the opposite shores of a sea are usually more alike than the coast and the inland provinces behind it. I have also often heard in Russia tales about the wealth of the Caucasus, which is the richest part of the Soviet Union. The Caspian confirmed the truth of both these statements. There was a distinct similarity of human types, of civilisation and to some extent even of scenery all around the Caspian sea. In the Caucasus one sometimes had the impression, unbelievable after Russia proper, of being in a prosperous country. The prices of poultry in the small port of Mahaczkala were exactly one tenth of the prices we used to pay in Kuibyshev. Was it due to transport conditions, or to the undoubtedly higher standard of civilisation of the ancient nations of the Caucasus? I did not have time to investigate the matter more closely.

Mahaczkala itself, rising from the sea in steep terraces, was a Mediterranean rather than a Russian town. It differed from a French town only by its standard of prosperity, and from a Syrian one hardly at all. Baku is a city rather like Marseilles, of course without its wealth, but with much of the southern character, expansive nature and even humour of Marseilles. It was certainly the first Soviet town which I could describe as gay. It had two main aspects, oriental and industrial. There was History and there was Oil. The minarets of a dozen old mosques, the high castle of the former khans of Baku and the towers of the fire worshippers were mixed with the der-

ricks and gleaming metal oil tanks. The grey promontory encircling the bay of Baku sparkled at night with dazzling lights and blazed with fire. The oil tankers of which we had seen so many on the Volga were filling up with their valuable cargo, gushing from many pipelines.

The ships navigating in the Caspian sea were very primitive and recalled the legendary vessels of Stienka Razin. The sea was calm and beautiful. We sailed peacefully towards the green shores of Persia. There was a surprise in store for us. It was the port of Pahlavi, the first Persian harbour and our doorway to Iran. Its buildings were erected a few years ago: they were brand new, like pavilions at an international exhibition, extremely well designed and very clean. The town was also thoroughly modern in its architecture. There were many shops with the usual colonial goods, mostly junk, but in large quantities. I was told that people leaving Russia after a long sojourn, like the released Poles, are invariably impressed by Persia, which looks to them rather like Paris in the eyes of Congo negroes. I also had that impression. Russia has been building for twenty years the foundations of industry, making tractors for the kolkhozes and tanks for the army. Persia has no industry of any importance, but it has filled its bazaars with European manufactured goods of all kinds and it has given tar surfaces to some of its roads. It has a modern make-up covering a thoroughly backward and Asiatic background. But good make-up can wonderfully improve even an ugly face.

The royal crowns and portraits are here again. The Shah of Persia who gave to the country its European veneer was the father of the present ruler. His career, from

sergeant to monarch, was typically Eastern and his methods were of the same kind. Modesty was not one of his points; he erected in Teheran alone three statues of himself, on horse and on foot. The port of Pahlevi used to bear a different name, but it was called after the new Shah. The King carried out an agrarian reform to his own liking: he confiscated the estates of the aristocracy, as well as the better farms, and declared them to be his personal property. He fully appreciated the importance of an access to the sea—and he therefore confiscated all land along the Caspian coast, the most fertile province in Persia. Distrusting the administrators of State property, he transferred it all to himself. His tireless though not entirely selfless activities extended even to hotel keeping. He developed a passion for building well designed and luxuriously fitted out hotels, sometimes in remote deserts or mountains, where they appear like a magical *fata morgana*. Driving along the coastal road from Pahlevi we saw such an oasis of modern hotel-keeping, full of mirrors, telephones and bored footmen. In the evening, luxuriating for the first time in two months in a private bathroom adjoining the bedroom, we realised more than ever how little the people of Moscow had to boast of in their palace hotel. If the world could be conquered by means of good hotels, Switzerland would be one of the greatest powers and Persia could take over half of Soviet Russia. Unfortunately political power depends on appliances built for anything but comfort and pleasure.

On the following day we drove along the road built by the last Shah, across the mountains, to Teheran. Endless columns of lorries were rolling in the opposite direction, carrying from the ports of the Persian Gulf a tre-

mendous volume of American and British supplies for Russia. The road was built some years ago by German engineers. Its use was reserved for the Shah and his courtiers. It is a beautiful mountain road, weaving its way through forests, bridging deep ravines and climbing in elaborate hairpin turns. The Caspian coast is a kind of Eastern Riviera, combining forest with the mountains and the sea. There are many smart, modern villas and neat little towns. Architecture was another of the Shah's passions and he often ordered whole towns, or quarters of Teheran, to be demolished and rebuilt according to new plans. The new cities erected by his order are wonderful examples of modern town planning: they recall, like Pahlevi, brand new exhibition pavilions.

FAREWELL TO RUSSIA

The road leading to the Teheran aerodrome is bad, with a surface like a desert track, but the aerodrome itself is up-to-date and well designed—by Germans. The Germans had made tremendous efforts in Iran, anxious to make of it a political, economic and even cultural base for their Asiatic schemes of expansion. The houses built by them are now used by Allied missions, the ports which they modernised are unloading Allied munitions, which are then transported towards Russia along the German-built roads of Persia. The Teheran aerodrome has become an important air junction of lines radiating to London and Delhi, Moscow and Ankara. There were Soviet soldiers at the aerodrome gates and many aeroplanes with the marking of the Red Star.

After brief farewells, we took off. Seen from 6,000

feet, Iran displays a barren hilly waste without water, vegetation or life. It is an old, very old country, desiccated like a mummy. Green and grey Russia, with her forests, steppes and broad rivers, is a young country, in its first days of Creation. The Middle East, the cradle of so many civilisations and so many States, rapacious powers which had devoured each other, seems to be a land which has lived its day. What we had left behind us was the future and the arid plateau spreading under the wings of our air-liner seemed, in spite of all reforms and improvements, to be a memory of a glorious past.

There was some time, before crossing the Biblical rivers of Mesopotamia, for a brief farewell to Russia, already far away and yet still in our eyes. The battle for Stalin-grad had just entered its first stage. The advance in the Caucasus was rapid. There was fierce fighting in all sectors. But Hitler's start had been delayed in that year by nearly eight weeks. These eight weeks were to decide the issue of the year's campaign, possibly also of the war. They gave to the Russians valuable time for preparations and robbed the Germans of two autumn months which they could have used well in their offensive.

In the narrow cabin of the aeroplane, I saw again all the people I had met in Russia during the year; the men of the Kremlin and those of the Narkomindiel; Tolstoy, Ehrenburg, Usijevich, Ignatiev; my nice Russian teacher, who had trembled for Moscow and yet believed in victory; the many officers whom I met all over the country; the soldier to whom we had given a lift in Pran; the people of the kolkhoz; everyone. And behind them I saw the silent Russian crowd. I felt that I wanted to speak to them, to

tell them something and to wish them something by way of farewell.

First of all, there is admiration for the way in which they are waging their battle. Without their struggle, no one knows what fate might await the world, or at any rate our continent. It may be a small continent, not as rich as others and not always wisely governed. The lights which shone over Memphis, Babylon, Suza, then over Rome and Byzantium have faded and others kindled from their fire seem to be dwindling too, but other lights are rising over America. The battle raging between Murmansk and Grozny might have decided their total extinction. The men who sacrificed all deserve our gratitude, no matter whether or not they knew what they were going to save.

The story of that stubborn defence will become a classic of history and an example for future generations, like Herodotus or Plutarch. But I hope that the people of Russia may obtain a richer reward than some grandiloquent words scribbled in dusty folios, known by name to all, but read by few. The reward I wish to Russia is happiness at last for her people.

I saw everywhere in Russia vast potentialities, such as are scarce in other, poorer countries. It has vaster forests than Canada and ancient cities more mysterious than those of India. It is more fertile in wheat than Argentina and has more gold than South Africa. Its huge area, several times larger than the whole of Europe, is crossed by some of the greatest rivers of the world, while in its mountains there is that elixir of motion without which the aeroplane, the tank and the warship are mere metal

scrap. It is a fortunate country in which there is no overcrowding as in Europe, in which there is no need for emigration or colonies. Nature has given to Russia everything that a country needs for prosperity and wealth—and yet few nations are further removed from them than Russia. I know, it had a tragic past. All the migrations of nations have swept across the Russian plain, and the country was invaded on all sides. The great beacons of civilisation were too far to spread to Russia the light and warmth which they radiated to other countries. Russians have lived for centuries under a Mongol rule far more severe than that of the Turks in the Balkans, comparable perhaps to the Moorish domination over Roman North Africa. Russia has produced tyrants surpassing in ferocity the Louis XI or Philip II of France and Spain, despots of wild cruelty. Russia has known religious persecution beside which the Holy Inquisition pales into insignificance and appears mild and benevolent by comparison. The revolutionary terror in Russia made the French Revolution look moderate and humanitarian in its methods.

You Russians have suffered in the past. In the XXth century you have been enduring the miseries of a nomadic life and famine, unknown to Europe since the Middle Ages. I understand that, after all these things, you cannot be other than you are. May your present sacrifice of blood be different from all the past ones. May it be fruitful instead of becoming another useless hecatomb of which you have seen so many. May you achieve at last freedom from fear, freedom of thought and freedom from want. May you be able to work and live peacefully, achieving at least as much prosperity as is enjoyed at present by many other nations, less richly endowed by

nature than you are. May your neighbors be able to look with calm and satisfaction at your progress. May your frontiers open their gateways to all, instead of separating you from the world with an impenetrable wall. May the whole world have at last an opportunity of admiring the romantic beauty of the Ukrainian steppes, the Promethean grandeur of the Caucasus, the mysterious attraction of Lake Baikal and the dark greatness of the Urals—just as it has known and loved for many years the tropical charm of Florida, the misty splendour of the Norwegian fiords, the romanesque, sun-warmed quality of Provence or the mauve, eerie beauty of Scotland.

Cease being a country outside our planet and do not let our countries be as unknown to you as India was before the great expedition and China before Marco Polo. May your youth learn to know and love the grey roofs of Paris, the green hills of Devon, the classical perfection of Swiss scenery, the rural and idyllic calm of the Netherlands, the Latin colour of southern France. May you become less unique and more human, more free though just as strong, less spectacular but better fed. May you have, after your turbulent history, your savage revolution and your heroic sacrifice in war, a peace as vast as your country, as rich as its soil and as sweet as the happiness of a home.

HERE is a breezy and informal record of a year in the Soviet Union by the accomplished Polish journalist, Xavier Pruszyński. Stationed in Russia as a member of the Polish Embassy staff, Pruszyński saw all and heard all. He poked his inquisitive nose into the humblest peasant's hut, and he dined in state at the Kremlin with Stalin. His journey carried him from the bleak port of Archangel to the southernmost borders of the Soviet Union. He was in Moscow when the German armies were within gun range and when the world felt certain that the streets of the Soviet capital would hear the tramp of Nazi boots. With Embassy staffs and news correspondents he went to Kuibyshev, from which 100,000 inhabitants had been moved to make room for evacuees from Moscow and other cities in Western Russia.

The author writes entertainingly about many of the outstanding personalities in the Soviet Union such as Stalin, Lozovsky, Ehrenburg, Alexei Tolstoi, Usjevitch, and General Ignatiev. He also makes some searching observations on the Jews in the Soviet Union and on the interned Poles who were released, among them such outstanding Polish figures as Alter and Ehrlich, the leaders of the Polish Bund.

Through the eyes and the vivid pen of this observant young Polish journalist and writer the reader is given a fresh, uninhibited view of an extraordinary country whose exploits on the field of battle have amazed the world.

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